DVD ROM 9 PLAYABLE DEMOS INCLUDING CARS

ALSO: PAC-MAN WORLD RALLY · URBAN CHAOS: RIOT RESPONSE

OFFICIAL U.S. PlayStation MAGAZINE

1UP NETWORK

$600! THE PS3

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine Issue 106 (July 2006)

ARE YOU READY?

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SONY'S NEW MACHINE

WE SNEAK A PEEK AT

10 PS3 GAMES

INCLUDING:

FINAL FANTASY XIII
METAL GEAR SOLID 4
ASSASSIN'S CREED
INDIANA JONES
RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN

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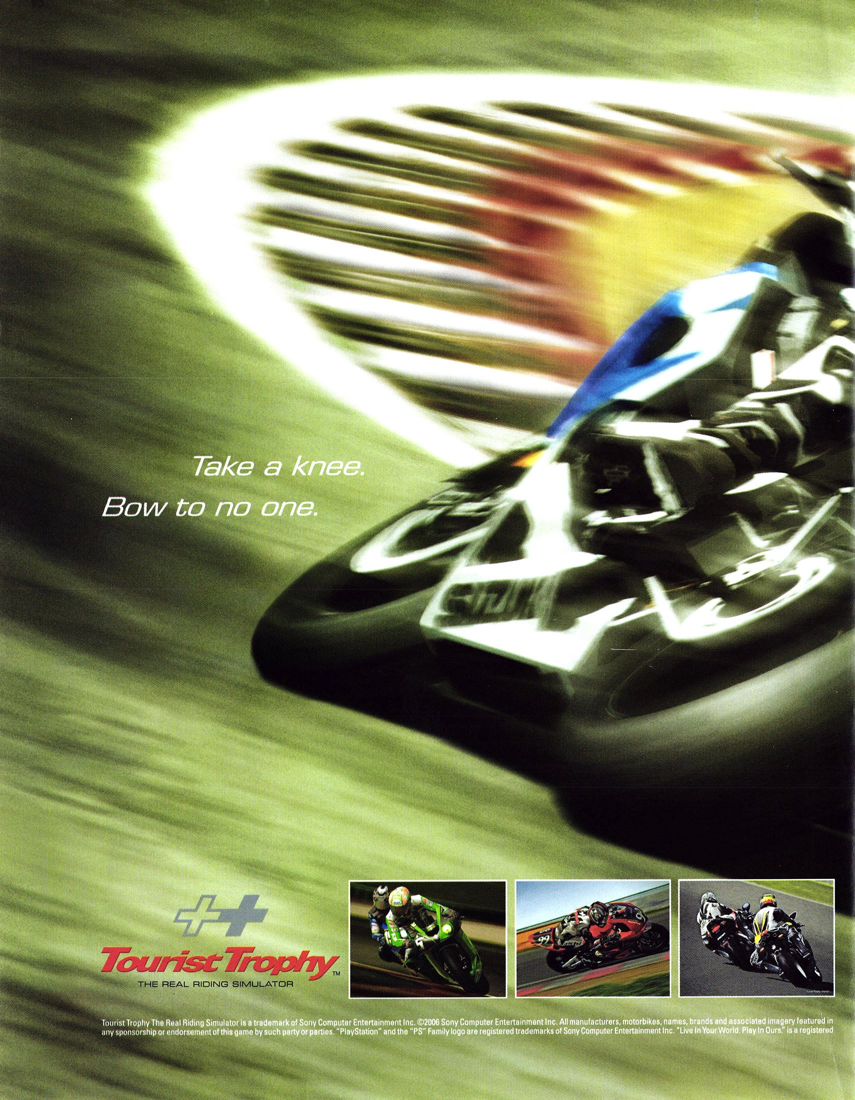
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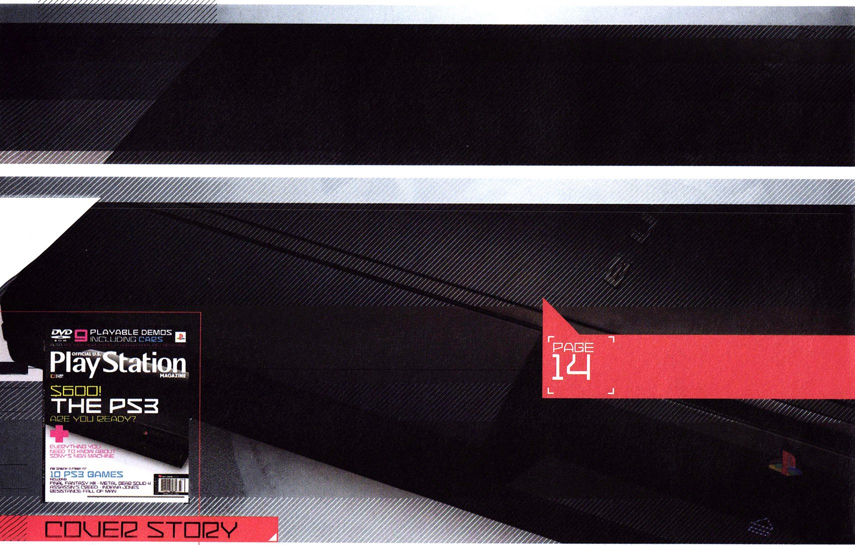

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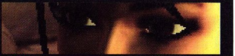

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We know that you miss us and want to hear from us every second of every day. Which is what's so damn awesome about opm.1UP.com, where we live online for every single second. OK, so we're not really online all the time (except for Scooter), but our voices are, in the form of our weekly podcast, radiOPM, where you can hear us blather about hot games like *Son of Man-Crab.*

Also awesome about opm.1UP.com is that it's your direct link to cool new sites in the 1UP Network. GameVideos.com is your home for all game-related video, whether it's the hottest new *MGS4* trailer or that goofy group of cosplayers acting out their favorite *Final Fantasy* moments. June is also when the first next-gen cheats site will finally launch, so keep your eye out for MyCheats.com.

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#106

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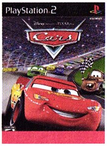
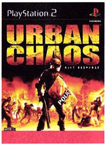
Issue 106
Sony

PLAY IT!



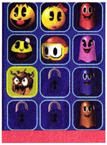
CARS

Relive Pixar's latest movie spectacularama, *Cars*, with speed racer Lightning McQueen and friends as you sample one of the races inspired by the film.



URBAN CHAOS: RIOT RESPONSE

Load up on this action-shooter, where an ex–U.S. Marine who's a part of an elite counter-gang unit is sent in to clean up the city.



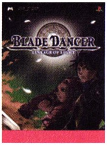
PAC MAN WORLD RALLY

Sample just a small piece of the pie that promises a wide range of characters and courses taken from Namco's various other games.

DEMO CLASSICS

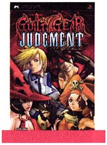
This month's demo classics showcase some of the best shooters out there, from *Medal of Honor: Frontline* to *Mercenaries* to *Metal Gear Solid 3*. Enjoy!

WATCH IT!



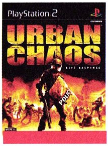
BLADE DANCER: LINEAGE OF LIGHT

Play solo or team up with friends for intense network play in this fantasy RPG featuring anime-style characters and a unique crafting system.



GUILTY GEAR JUDGMENT

Check out the bizarre cast of characters and unique fighting styles of the *Guilty Gear* series as it makes its way onto the PSP.



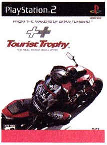
URBAN CHAOS: RIOT RESPONSE

See what it means to take on the gangs and clean up the city in this first-person shooter where chaos reigns supreme.

X-MEN: THE OFFICIAL GAME

Join Wolverine, Nightcrawler, and Iceman and tap into your mutant powers in a fight against villains from the third *X-Men* movie.

WATCH IT!



TOURIST TROPHY

Get inside the game with the guys who brought you *Gran Turismo* to learn what went into bringing motorcycles to your PS2; then read our interview with Yamauchi on page 94.

WARPED TOUR/GAP PROFILE

Being an Underground member sure has its rewards. Check out this GAP member as he joins the Warped Tour.

Vans Warped Tour '06
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WELCOME TO (Y)OUR WORLD

Here at the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*, we pride ourselves on bringing you the latest and greatest playable demos the gaming world has to offer. This is one of the many benefits of reading *OPM*, which you are holding right here in your hands.

This month take Pixar's newest hero, Lightning McQueen, for a spin in *Cars*, or try your hand at being a gang's worst nightmare in *Urban Chaos: Riot Response*.

The DVD also features a nice roundup of some of the PS2's greatest shooters to give your trigger finger a good workout.

So, what are you waiting for? Grab the disc and get to your PlayStation 2.

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DISC PROBLEMS?

Did you buy a copy of our magazine that did not contain a demo DVD? Simply send the receipt in an envelope marked "OPM Replacement Disc" to OPM Disc Producer, Ziff Davis Media, 101 2nd Street, San Francisco, CA 94105, with the name and address of the store plus your phone number and address and we'll send you the disc. Make sure you specify which month the corresponding disc belongs to in order to ensure you get the right one. If you have a malfunctioning or nonworking demo disc, call EDS at 1-800-627-6458. They will provide instructions to obtain repair or replacement services. Sony Computer Entertainment America (SCEA) warrants to the original purchaser of the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine* that the demo disc included is free from defects in material and workmanship for a period of ninety (90) days from the date of purchase. SCEA agrees for a period of ninety (90) days to either repair or replace, at its option, the SCEA product. You must call EDS at 1-800-627-6458 to receive instructions to obtain repair/replacement services. This warranty shall not be applicable and shall be void if the defect in the SCEA product has arisen through abuse, unreasonable use, mistreatment, neglect, or breakage during shipment. THIS WARRANTY IS IN LIEU OF ALL OTHER WARRANTIES AND NO OTHER REPRESENTATIONS OR CLAIMS OF ANY NATURE SHALL BE BINDING ON OR OBLIGATE SCEA. ANY IMPLIED WARRANTIES APPLICABLE TO THIS SOFTWARE PRODUCT, INCLUDING WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY AND FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE, ARE LIMITED TO THE NINETY (90) DAY PERIOD DESCRIBED ABOVE. IN NO EVENT WILL SCEA BE LIABLE FOR INCIDENTAL OR CONSEQUENTIAL DAMAGES RESULTING FROM POSSESSION, USE, OR MALFUNCTION OF THE SCEA SOFTWARE PRODUCT.

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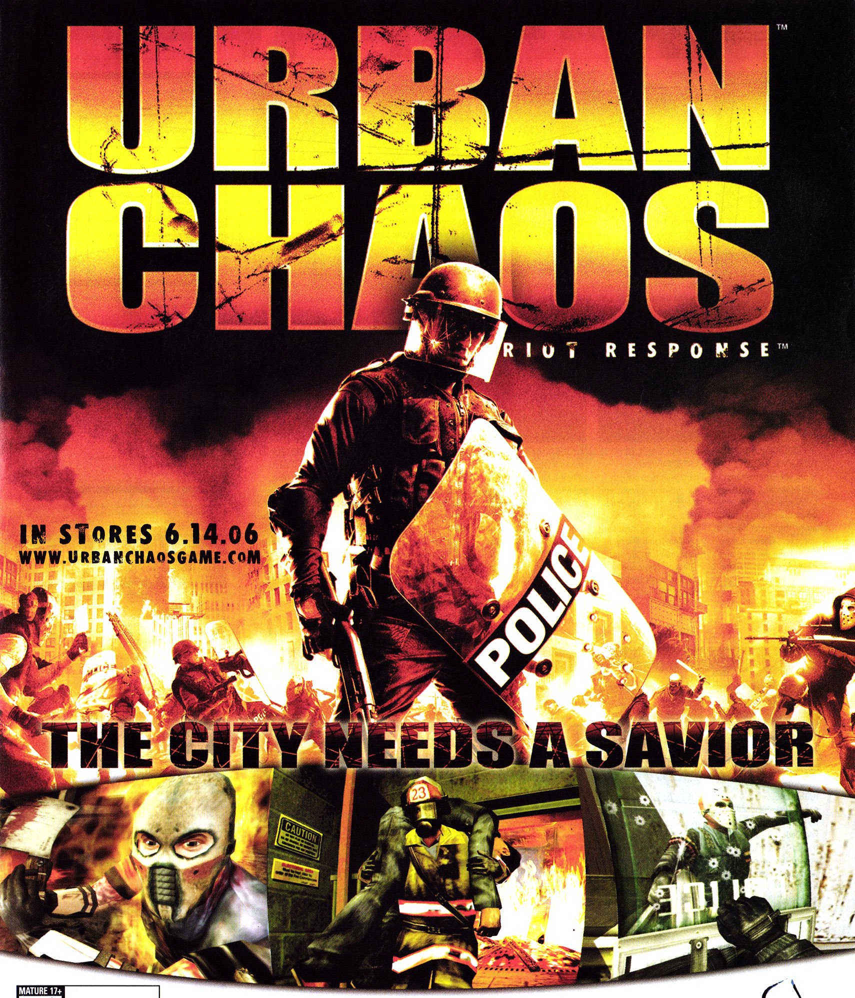
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Strong Language
Intense Violence

PlayStation.2

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rocksteady

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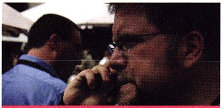
THE OPM FAMILY



TOM BYRON

is relieved his order for an airstrike on E3 was countermanded. Sure, he got a little cranky with all the people, the noise and the walking around, but then he was reminded of the awesomeness of the PS3 (*Assassin's Creed* GOTS!), the pleasantries of the Nintendo Wii (Sony needs to recruit Miyamoto-san, stat!) and a few titles he liked on the Xbox 360. Is he miffed about the PS3's $599 price tag? Well, sure. Is he gonna get one? Well, sure. (He also notes that Joe's pic makes him look like one of the Borg.)

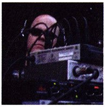
DANA JONGEWAARD

was just told that:

A) Scooter ate 279 corn dogs at the Sony press conference.

B) Nomura has a pack of ligers trained to give him tongue baths.

C) There are only 363 days left until she has to go to E3 again.



JOE RYBICKI

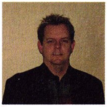
usually finds E3 to be a mess of lights, noise, sore feet, and alcohol. This year it was lights, noise, sore feet, alcohol, and wires, as he sat in on both radiOPM and 1UP Yours as they podcasted their way through the show. Life behind the mic is good....

THIERRY NGUYEN

is caught experiencing "E3 dementia." Similar to "space dementia," it's when the hustle, bustle, noise, throngs of nerds, and excess booth babes overwhelm the mind and cause one to go madder than a hatter on Boxing Day.

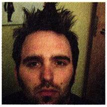
GIANCARLO VARANINI

can't wait to explain to his girlfriend why paying $600 for the PS3 is good because it does *everything*, including cleaning, cooking, bomb disarmament, bomb armament, oxidation, photosynthesis, and home security. Yay, PS3!!!



LOGAN PARR

thinks it would be great if future gaming would allow you to start a game on your PS3, continue your game on your PSP while traveling, and then load that PSP save back into the PS3, so you can carry on with your adventure. Now THAT would be sweet.



RYAN VULK

had a hard enough time pulling the trigger in *Metal Gear Solid 3*, so needless to say, he is really dreading the choice that awaits him in *MGS4*. But that doesn't mean that he isn't anxiously awaiting the opportunity to be afraid to do it.

ALEJANDRO CHAVETTA

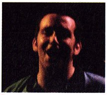
spent his entire time during E3 2006 looking through the viewfinder of an SLR camera. Needless to say, he's now in need of an eye patch, a facial massage, and enough storage space to save the 6,000 or so photos that he took.

EXTENDED FAMILY

JAMES MIELKE

shares with the world his disturbingly extensive knowledge of Japan's bizarro world of pop culture in his debut as the writer of J-Town. We're a-scared. No, really.

milkman.1UP.com



PATRICK JOYNT

covered the E3 extravaganza as one the legion of 1UP henchmen at this year's show. And by "covered," we mean drank our Coronas and heckled us.

halofire.1UP.com

ROBERT ASHLEY

comes from Texas, where they grow their game reviewers tall and snarky. He also makes music in not one, but two different bands. He's multifunctional like that.

robertashley.1UP.com

GREG SEWART

hails from the same country cold comes from: Canada. He worked for *OPM*'s sister mag, *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, for years before joining, and then leaving, the game-design community.

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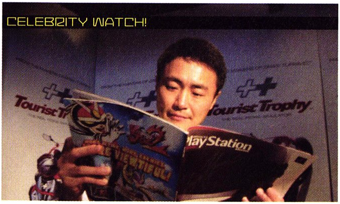


KAZUNORI YAMAUCHI READS OPM!

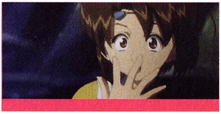
LETTER OF THE MONTH

MOTHER KNOWS BEST

My mom won't let me get *God of War* because it's rated M. *Unreal Tournament 2007* will be rated M, so I won't be able to get that, either. Can you please write something to convince my mom to let me get one or both of these? If you do, I'll refer your magazine to all of my friends, even those who own an Xbox.

Michael
Via e-mail

Sure, Michael. Here's how to convince your mother to let you play M-rated games: Tell her that you'll patiently wait until you turn 17! You see, Michael, OPM *may really stand for* Omnipotently Powerful Magazine, *but there are forces in the universe that even we don't dare take on, and your mother is one of them.*



WHERE'S THE "SHUT UP" BUTTON?

Recently, I played *Wild Arms 4* and found the amount of dialogue and cut-scenes annoying! I think gamemakers are confusing quantity of dialogue with a deep and engrossing story line. *Tales of Legendia* was even worse. When I play a game, I don't want to use the controller just to advance text. I want RPGs with complex puzzles, weapons, magic, and towns to explore. I don't mind a reasonable amount of dialogue, just not to the exclusion of gameplay. I've played plenty of games that had an interesting story line that wasn't oppressive. Stop taking the "game" out of gaming!

Clancy Morris
Via e-mail

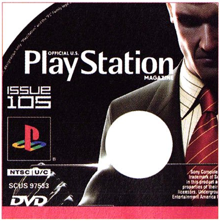
Amen, Clancy! As RPG lovers ourselves, long have we suffered the pain of excessive chatter that cannot be bypassed. Thankfully, in most RPGs, the incessant gabbing lasts only for the first hour or two of gameplay at most. (Tom cites Monster Hunter Freedom *as his latest example: Play it for a an hour or two, and you'll want to kill more than monsters after all the talking; play it more than that, and it's pretty much all action.)*

A GOOD ANSWER DESERVES A GOOD QUESTION

In your June 2006 issue [#105], you gave PS2 owners a reason to keep the console by listing a handful of good games that are still coming out for it. The one very important game you forgot to mention is *Guitar Hero II*. Honestly, you guys even gave love to a new *Lego Star Wars* game. Did you forget *GH2* was coming out? I expect a good answer.

Jim Reilly
Via e-mail

Well, Mr. I'm Important, we didn't forget. You may recall that OPM *loves* Guitar Hero*: Joe gave it a rousing 4.5/5 in his review (*OPM *#98), and we're all set to love* Guitar Hero II*, too! Turn to page 67 for more* GH2 *goodness—and while you're there, check out all the other great PS2 games coming this fall.*



WELL HIDDEN

That was pretty cool thing you guys did, having a hidden demo [*OPM* DVD #105]. I think it would be cool if you guys added a hidden demo every month and a different way to access it. Anyway, keep up the great work on the best videogame magazine around. Oh, and the Phil Harrison interview was pretty awesome, too. Thanks again for a great magazine.

Enrique Sepulveda
Via e-mail

Thanks, Enrique. You and all your friends can expect more hidden demos on the award-winning OPM *DVD in the future. Stay tuned.*

YOU'LL BOTH BE FIRST IN LINE; YOU KNOW YOU WILL!

You can rationalize it all you want. You can talk about Blu-ray until you are blue in the face. Go ahead and mention the unexpected tilt sensor built into the controller. Go ahead and speak of the Cell processor as the greatest computational power known to man.

But $599 is too much for a game console!

I can afford to buy the PS3 when it comes out, but I won't. Sony is unwilling to sell the PS3 at a reasonable market price because the company is unwilling to take a sizable loss on it, and in doing so, Sony is hurting—and possibly changing—gaming as we know it. Each PS3 bought at that price will be a vote for ridiculously higher prices from all three major console makers in the next generation.

It doesn't make sense. Sony is fighting two wars with the PS3: the game-console format war and the high-def-movie format war. All Sony had to do was slap a $399.99 price tag on the PS3, and it would have won both battles hands-down. I read an article where [Sony Computer Entertainment president and CEO Ken Kutaragi] said that the PS3 was too cheap at $599 and another where [SCE Europe CEO David Reeves] said that it didn't matter what games were ready for launch, because the first 5 million PS3s will sell regardless. Am I the only one out there offended by these statements?

I hope not. I hope every game fan and journalist alike does the responsible thing and lets Sony know that just because it's been the market leader for two generations running doesn't mean it can just change the way the business runs and force prices up.

Dennisj
Via e-mail

Well, now that Sony has announced the pricing on the PS3, I guess we can say that it's put the final nail in its own coffin. The next-gen war hasn't started, because it's already over. Sony may as well have handed everything over to Microsoft, for five reasons: 1) Pricing. $500 and $600 prices are way too high; Sony had to match the Xbox 360's lower price, which it didn't. 2) Blu-ray. OK, Sony, maybe you want to push "Betamax 2," but really, how many times have you watched a movie on your console? 3) Gyration. Dropping the rumble feature in the controller for a gyroscope is just plain dumb! 4) *GTA4*. I hear it's exclusive to the Xbox 360. 5) No killer app! Sure, you'll have *Metal Gear Solid 4*—and what else? A shinier, more expensive version of *Gran Turismo 4*? Big deal! Where's that kick-ass trailer for *Killzone* now? Better yet, where the hell was the game, period?

No great games at launch + high pricing = NO SALES!

Dan Meloche
Via e-mail

We're sure when Sony reads your letters, it'll respond by lowering the price! Ah, we're just foolin', and so are you.

While we were all pretty surprised by the PS3 price tag (after all, is anyone ever happy to hear that something is $200 more expensive than expected?), we're betting that the PS3 will indeed be worth every one of your 59,999 pennies. Take a look at Giancarlo's PS3 feature starting on page 14 for the whole scoop, and then check out our PS3 previews beginning on page 48. Quick note to Dan: You heard wrong; GTA4 *is being developed for both the PS3 and the Xbox 360. And* Killzone *is still a year or two away, so Sony probably doesn't want to distract folks from the similarly genred* Resistance: Fall of Man *(Insomniac), which is a launch title.*

Shadowmas
Rhuhinaror
hae
Koserian
Vok
Darewahyonchiwa

HARD-DRIVE FANTASY

I recently read the article about *Final Fantasy XI* (OPM #104, May 2006), and I'm pleasantly surprised and glad that the *OPM*/1UP staff plays *FFXI*. I bought the HDD in 2004 mainly for the *SOCOM II* downloads, but even though I had *FFXI* for a long time, I didn't start playing it until a few months ago.

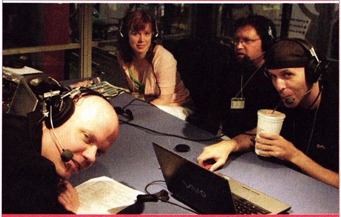
FFXI is a great game, isn't it? I have a couple of questions for Ryan and James Mielke: What servers are you on? I am Darewahyonchiwah, a 34 Blm/17 Whm tarutaru hailing from Windurst on the Alexander server.

Donald V. Losel Jr.
Via e-mail

OPM art director Ryan Vulk responds: "Thanks for writing! I am Melkor, a 75 ninja, on the Ramuh server." James Mielke would respond, but Dana killed him for being so late with his deadline in this issue's J-Town.

RADIOPM

BEHIND THE SCENES AND BEYOND THE PAGES OF THE OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE



RADIOPM IS ON THE AIR!

Is your monthly *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine* fix not enough for you? Then tune in to radiOPM at **radiOPM.1UP.com** to hear your favorite editors in all of gamedom elaborate on stories from past, current, and future issues. On radiOPM, the *OPM* crew—lead by that host with the most, Joe Rybicki—discusses breaking news from the world of PlayStation and beyond, serving up half an hour (or so) of audio hilarity and wisdom every single week. Hear what goes on behind the scenes of your favorite PlayStation magazine—no topic is off limits. New episodes go live every Monday, so tune in today!

PENNY ARCADE

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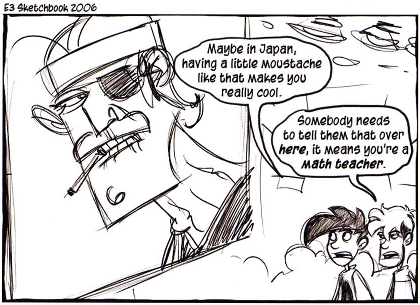
E3 Sketchbook 2006
Maybe in Japan, having a little moustache like that makes you really cool.
Somebody needs to tell them that over here, it means you're a math teacher.

Gabe and Tycho take in the Metal Gear Solid 4 trailer

PlayStation
MERCENARIES: WORLD IN FLAMES
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HYPE

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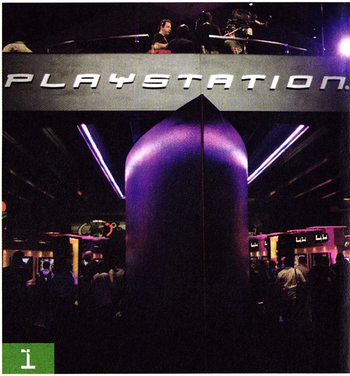

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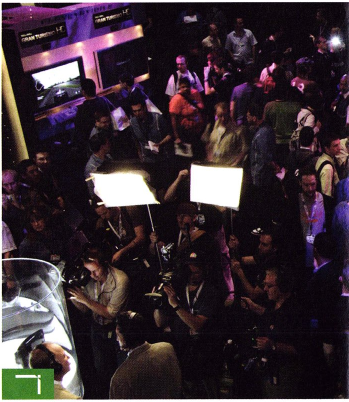

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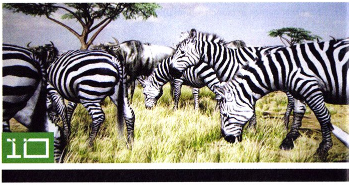

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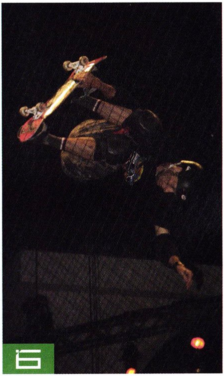

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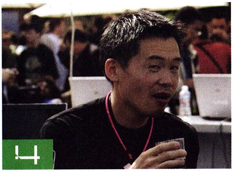

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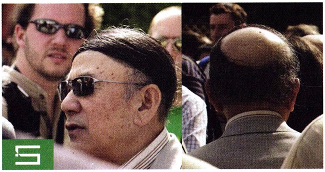

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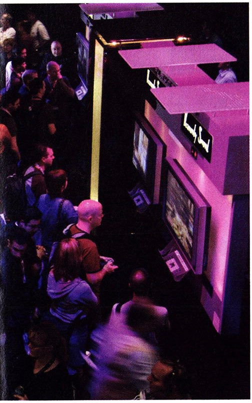

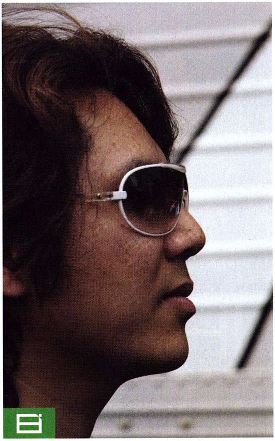

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1 The entrance to the promised land: the PlayStation 3 area at the Sony booth. Lots of people who can't afford the system walked under that bridge.

2 Here we see Kojima Productions' Hideo Kojima chatting it up with Clover Studios' Atsushi Inaba about the merits of having creepy old guys stalk you.

3 We ran into Mr. Kutaragi, president and CEO of Sony CE, at the Sony press conference, right before he left on his yacht made of gold and puppy dogs.

4 Is he hitting on us? Capcom's Keiji Inafune shoots a seductive glance in our direction while enjoying a frosty beverage.

5 This press conference attendee is awesome. That's all. Just purely awesome.

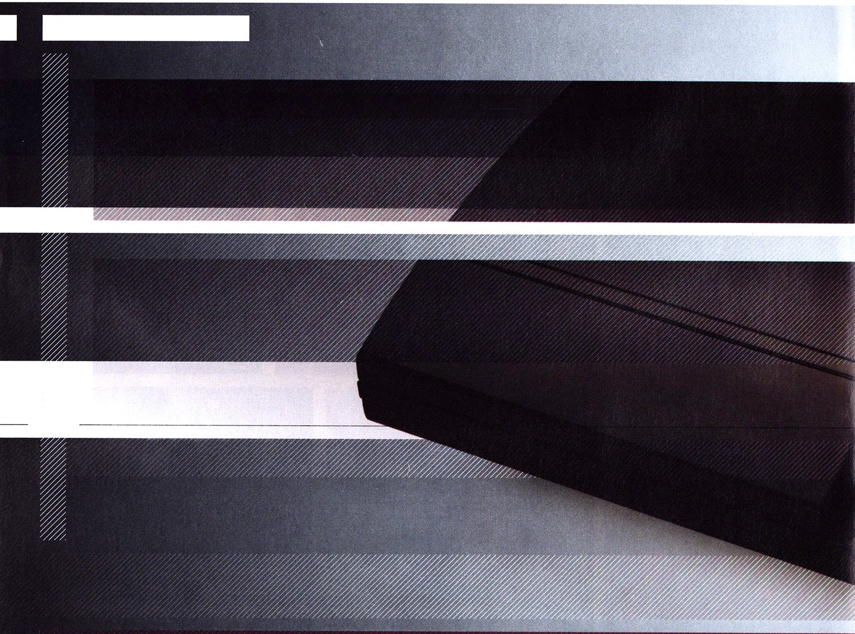
6 Tony Hawk doing what he does best....Yeah, we don't know either.

7 Joe! Dana! Look out! Kaz is right behind you, and he has both a headset and *Ridge Racer*!

8 Only the man behind *Resident Evil 4*, Hiroyuki Kobayashi, could possibly get away with wearing glasses like this.

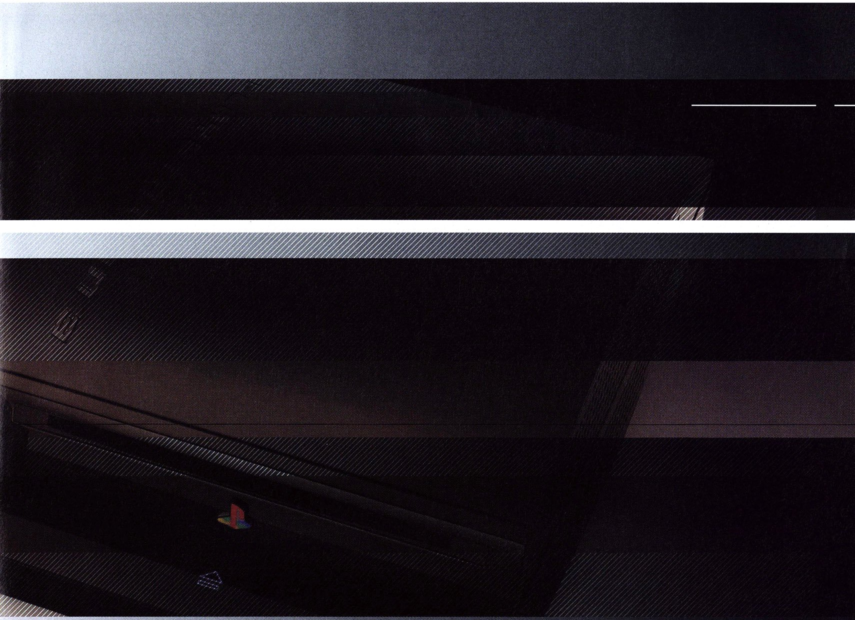
9 Wow, piracy has sunk so low that people are now filming the movies off of PSP screens. Look for it on the streets of Shanghai tomorrow.

10 We're not really sure where the game is in one of Sony's new titles, *Afrika*. Perhaps it is simply the best $600 screensaver that money can buy!



PS3: WHAT'S THE

INSIDE SONY'S STRATEGY FOR MAKING YOU WANT TO BE ONE OF THE FIRST TO OWN A PIECE OF THE NEXT GENERATION



DEAL?

November 17 is the day. You know the price. You've seen the games—most of them anyway. You know what it can do. You've finally seen the controller. The only remaining question: Are you buying it? There's no question that the PlayStation 3 will help usher in the next generation of videogames with its ridiculously powerful processing capabilities and multimedia functions. Not to mention that the PlayStation 3's online capabilities are up to par with what people expect from a gaming console. Normally, all of this would result in pandemonium for the PlayStation fan base, with PlayStation 2 owners clamoring to get their hands on the new system. The mainstream public would be abuzz with the forthcoming onslaught of media coming from all directions, but that's not quite the case, at least not yet. Most are waiting to see exactly what it is that they're paying for, regardless of which version of the PlayStation 3 they're interested in. Others are waiting to see just how exactly it all works together and if the experience will be worth the price of admission. But there's a whole different way to look at the PlayStation 3, and to prompt you to do that, we only have to ask one question: How much did you pay for that new digital camera?

WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN

SONY'S IN CONTROL OF ITS FUTURE

THE CONTROLLER
A SHOCKING EVOLUTION

What once looked like a reject from the Chiquita Banana factory is now familiar again. Indeed, the PlayStation 3 controller is essentially a DualShock-style controller, complete with two analog sticks and all of the same buttons. However, now it has an additional button in the center that can be used to power the console off and access the system menu, much like the 360 controllers have. The PS3 controller is also lighter than before—even lighter than the PlayStation 2's DualShock 2 controller. But of course, the most important new feature of the PS3 controller is its motion-sensing capability, which detects six degrees of motion (X, Y, and Z planes as well as pitch, yaw, and roll).

DID SONY STEAL THE IDEA?
A LONG TIME COMING

The controller seems like it's a pretty blatant rip-off of Nintendo's Wii controller, or at least like a reactionary move to it. But the idea, apparently, has been in the works for quite some time. "It was so secret that people thought we came up with it [right before E3]," Kaz Hirai explains. "But this thing has been in [Ken] Kutaragi's mind for the longest time. Do you remember the original PlayStation controller, the one without the analog sticks? We started there, and then we added the two sticks for the analog controller. Then we added the vibration feature and called it the DualShock controller, and then we came up with the DualShock 2, which had pressure-sensitive buttons."

Hirai continues, "Every time we added some functionality, it was to make the controller be more intuitive, to make it feel like a part of your body, and to make it more realistic in terms of how it interacts with the game. Now we've added the motion sensors, so it's the natural progression of wanting to improve the controller so that it becomes a natural extension of your body. If you see how the controller has evolved, it seems natural, as opposed to 'Hey, look at this.' This didn't come as something that we wanted to do the day of the press conference."

> "IF YOU SEE HOW THE CONTROLLER HAS EVOLVED, IT SEEMS NATURAL."

DOES IT WORK?
YOU BET IT DOES

Surprisingly, the controller worked absolutely great with the only game, Incognito's *Warhawk*, that supports its functionality at the

MYTH BUSTERS

Mysteries of the PlayStation 3 controller revealed

Has the price been set?
No, Sony has yet to discuss pricing.

Is it backward compatible with the PS2?
Not with the PS2 hardware, and current DualShocks can't be used on the PlayStation 3.

Will the controller for the $499 unit be wired?
No, it will remain wireless so that it can also make effective use of the motion sensors.

So no wireless controllers were at the show?
False. Sony did indeed have a few units equipped with full wireless controllers, but they were tied to the booth so that people couldn't run off with them.

LEARNING TO FLY

OPM had a chance to try out *Warhawk* with the new controller in the VIP area of Sony's E3 booth, which was intended to replicate a living room. Needless to say, we're pretty impressed with what the controller can do.

moment. It's also pretty sensitive, with every slight movement affecting the direction of the ship. It's also worth pointing out that it feels pretty natural as well (despite the fact that you initially feel like a complete spaz). But what does Incognito think? "We've been working on the technology for a while, but we weren't sure when it was going to show up in the controller," says Dylan Jobe, producer at Incognito. "We were internally hypothesizing that Sony was going to do something big, so it has to be this. We worked on our physics system to make sure it would be a seamless transition, and then Sony of Japan finally allowed us to be introduced to [the actual controller]. When we finally got our hands on it, there was only about a week and a half [until E3]. It was a really good marriage with *Warhawk*."

Jobe adds, "Part of the reason why I think people believe you need to make exaggerated movements while using the controller comes from me flailing around onstage [during the E3 press conference]. It's an incredibly precise device, and what we'll end up doing is allowing you to control the sensitivity and acceleration, because some people want really precise controls and others want flailing. We found that the data coming off the sensor gave us more precision than the analog sticks alone, and when we first heard about it, we thought we [were going to have to do a lot of research]. But when we got it, we found that it's completely stand-alone in that it calibrates itself and doesn't have to register with anything. It just automatically works."

HOW MANY DEVELOPERS KNEW?

I FEWER THAN YOU THINK

Not that many developers actually knew about the motion-sensor abilities of the PlayStation 3 controller. In fact, some of the biggest names—including Koei, Capcom, Konami, Electronic Arts, Sega, and even some of Sony's first-party developers—knew nothing about the controller until the day of the Sony press conference at E3. Conversely, Konami's Hideo Kojima said that he knew of the controller shortly before the press conference, and of course, Incognito, developer of *Warhawk*, was told about the feature a few weeks before. "We owe companies outside of Sony an apology, but we wanted to keep it secret," says Hirai. "That's why we didn't give it to everybody, because we wanted to make sure that the information was controlled. Adding that functionality doesn't require the recoding of the entire game. I liken it to when we came out with the DualShock controller—people were asking how many games used the feedback and if it was easy to program for. We're going to start sharing information with third parties."

WHERE'S THE RUMBLE?

Someone stole my DualShock

Many may be disappointed to find that the new controller doesn't actually have a force-feedback feature like the previous PlayStation controllers do. We've heard some speculation that the reason stems from Sony's recent problems with Immersion—the company that filed a lawsuit against Sony for patent infringement on its force-feedback technology—and the fact that Sony would have to pay a royalty fee to Microsoft if it wanted to keep using the technology, since Microsoft now owns part of Immersion.

Sony CEA president and CEO Kaz Hirai says the reasons are much simpler than that. "You can't have it both ways. If you're flying a plane and you shoot a rocket and it vibrates, the plane is going to move around, so we can't have it both ways. I think it's the right decision, because the DualShock was great for what it did, but it is a reaction to what you're doing, while this is an active input methodology. We'd like to have both, but you can't have it that way," says Hirai. "R&D is one of these things where you're constantly trying to improve it. Trying to isolate the sensitivity from the vibration mechanism is the challenge. Having said that, there is no end to R&D, so if we can come up with [something where] the motion sensor isn't picking up the rumble, there's no reason we shouldn't do that."

A TALE OF TWO SKUs

SONY CEA PRESIDENT AND CEO KAZ HIRAI EXPLAINS WHY YOU'LL BE SEEING TWO PLAYSTATION 3s LATER THIS YEAR

OPM Can you tell us what the logic is behind the $600 price point?

KAZ HIRAI There are two configurations. Take a look at what we put into the box, whether it's the Cell processor or the fact that it will play Blu-ray. The fact that it's ready to tackle the HD world in terms of output. The fact that it's ready to go online out of the box. The fact that it's backward compatible with PlayStation and PlayStation 2 hardware. The fact that we have the heritage of providing the depth and breadth of games that are second to none. We always talk about having a 10-year cycle, so this isn't a system that we're going to ask consumers to ditch in three years, four years, or five years. If you put all of that in context, it makes for a great consumer value for everyone.

OPM Why is one SKU $500 when the differences are the lack of HDMI and the memory slots?

KH What we wanted to avoid is coming out with a PlayStation 3 that's configured to be bare-bones, because that starts affecting gameplay, and we didn't want to do that. Some of the other platform holders have gone down that path with one unit that doesn't even have a hard drive, and that affects gameplay. Obviously, a hard drive isn't just for downloading stuff—you can cache stuff and get faster loading times as well. Without going into the dangerous area of affecting gameplay, we looked at the functionality and asked: If we're still able to provide the same gameplay, what are some of the features that users can upgrade later on, that they won't need or want from day one? That's where we said the [slots for] removable flash cards, the wireless [online connection], and the HDMI, because most sets don't have HDMI and you can still get 1080p using other connection options, so there's no problem there. That's why we went down that path. I guess we could've said here's a wired controller, but now that we have a motion-sensor controller, that would be just wrong.

> "IT'S BACKING INTO THE PRICE BASED ON WHAT WE CAN OFFER CONSUMERS."

OPM Still, that equates to $100?

KH We don't want the price difference to be $300 or $200, because that's a pretty big gap. It's backing into the price based on what we can offer consumers. We're not just stripping out features. But we're saying that there are consumers that may not even be interested in connecting wirelessly. They may not even have a hot spot in their home. They don't care. We wanted to make sure that at any stage in the life cycle we're giving consumers the option and not forcing stuff on them that they don't even need. I guess it's new in this business, but that's the way it's been done in the PC business forever, with [multiple configurations]. I think the days of having one PlayStation at $299...those days are gone.

OPM How are you going to convince consumers that $600 is the new magic price point?

KH The basic approach we'll take is similar to the approach we took with the PlayStation Portable. That it does a lot of fun things, but we don't want to dilute the message. You'll confuse the consumer even more if you go out there and say if it's a multimedia platform. The first thing we need to say is that the PS3 is the best console out there for interactive games. This is the console to have. Behind that, look at all of the other things it can do. That's the way to approach it, and that's what we did with the PSP. Because having gone out there and said this is a great movie player, and by the way it also plays games, we have to ask ourselves: Who are we marketing this to? We have to make sure that we appeal to people who are interested in playing games...I'm not going to say core gamers, but people who want the cutting edge.

OPM What about people who just want a PlayStation but don't know the technology behind it? Why would they want to pay $600? Is it time to focus on the other abilities?

KH I'm not saying we're not going to talk about it. We're going to say this is a fantastic gaming machine, and by the way it does all of this other stuff. It's not like you can't ask me about Blu-ray. I point to how we marketed the PlayStation Portable, where we talked about the games primarily but at every opportunity we had we talked about the movies and photos, too. You have to take it in steps. As the demographic becomes wider, you can't shower them with all of this, because they won't get any of it and won't be interested. The type of consumer—you have to differentiate between a first-time gamer who has heard about a PS3 and wants to look at it, and the owners of the PS1 and PS2.

If it's a first-time gamer looking at the price tag, they'll probably say that it's a pretty heavy investment, even if they know what it can do. But if they're not sure if they're ready to jump in, I'd point them right at the PlayStation 2. It's not a console that's going away any time soon. Look how much effort we put into making sure it got the deserved prominence in our booth, and it's backwards compatible with the PS3 so the software investment doesn't go by the wayside. Then they can feel comfortable going with the PS3 three or four years from now.

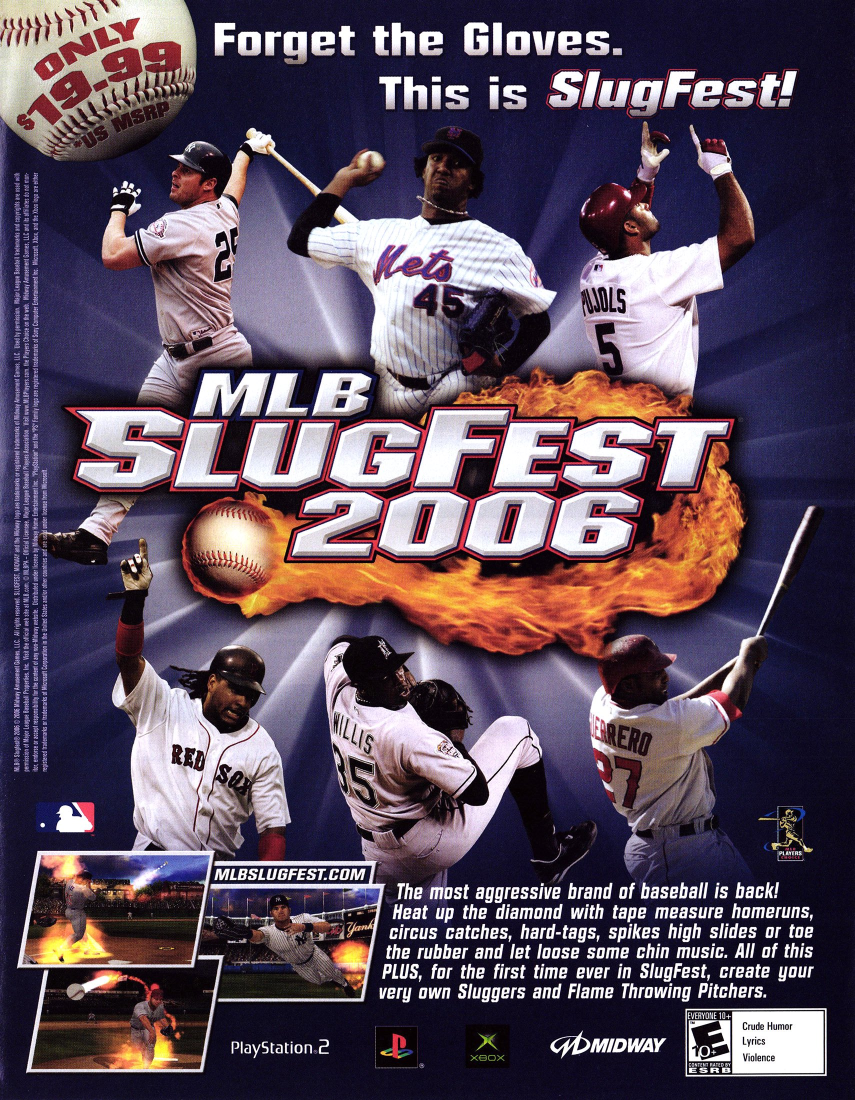
The people [who] own a PlayStation 2 know that it's a natural progression. [The PS3] does so much more, in addition to playing HD games. The message to them is a bit clearer because they've already been a part of the PlayStation family, so they're already interested in reading about the features and what it can do beyond the PlayStation 2 they bought back in 2001.

SONY CEA PRESIDENT KAZ HIRAI

MSRP	$499	$599
MEMORY		
System	256MB XDR	256MB XDR
Video	256MB GDDR3	256MB GDDR3
INPUT		
Wireless	√	√
Bluetooth controller	√	√
USB 2.0 (four ports)	√	√
VIDEO OUTPUT		
AV Multi-Out (component/ S-Video/ composite)	√	√
HDMI		√
Supported video resolutions		
480i	√	√
480p	√	√
720p	√	√
1080i	√	√
1080p*	√	√
AUDIO OUTPUT		
Optical audio	√	√
Supported audio formats		
Dolby 5.1	√	√
DTS	√	√
STORAGE		
Hard drive**	2.5-INCH SERIAL ATA 20GB	2.5-INCH SERIAL ATA 60GB
Blu-ray drive	√	√
Supported disc formats		
Blu-ray	√	√
DVD	√	√
CD	√	√
SACD	√	√
Memory stick		√
Secure digital		√
CompactFlash		√
CONNECTIVITY		
Ethernet (up to 1000BASE-T)	√	√
Bluetooth 2.0	√	√
Wi-Fi (IEEE 802.11b/g)		√

*1080P IS POSSIBLE VIA COMPONENT BUT IS GENERALLY UNSUPPORTED BY TV MANUFACTURERS

** UPGRADEABLE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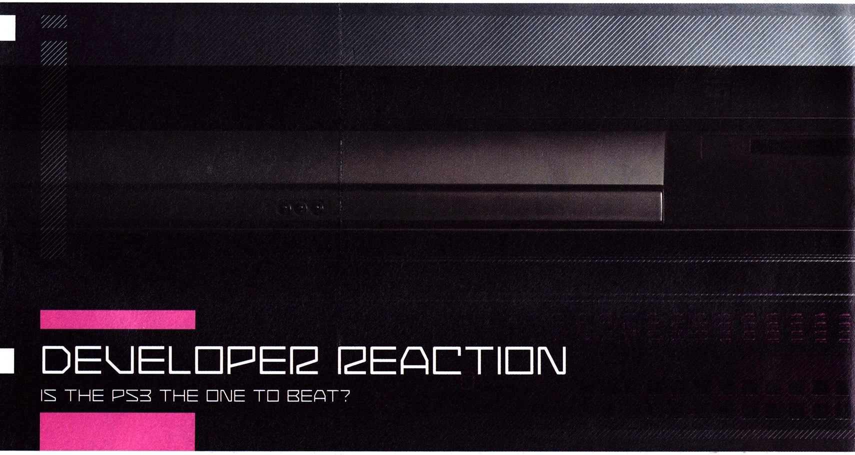


DEVELOPER REACTION

IS THE PS3 THE ONE TO BEAT?

HIROSHI KATAOKA

Producer at Sega (*Virtua Fighter 5*), on being able to bring an arcade classic home

"From a purely technical standpoint, the arcade Lindbergh hardware uses the Nvidia graphics chip, so it was a fairly easy choice. Graphically, there's always pressure to be on the cutting edge, but we also want to be on the cutting edge of gameplay."

ATSUSHI INABA

President of Clover Studio (*Okami, Viewtiful Joe*), on creating next-gen worlds, and on the controller

"One of the most difficult things about fantasy games is that they require a lot of imagination on the part of developers. Since the next-generation consoles are so new, I think that the imaginative power of developers has yet to kick in. In the future, once they come to grips with the hardware and don't necessarily have to worry about how to use the hardware but are simply creating worlds within the hardware, then we'll see more and more creative and original-style games. So if you look at a game like *Metal Gear Solid 4*, the characters have an incredible sense of being and history to them. They're almost like living people. Even though the game has very realistic graphics, you still have the idea that this game has a world for the player to exist in. A lot of games look very realistic, and as people come to understand the hardware, the more it will open up the creative possibilities of hardware.

"The Wii controller was something that was known, and people were already starting to imagine of what you could do with that controller. The PlayStation conference—seeing that controller and not knowing about it beforehand was just a shock and made me rethink what I thought about the PlayStation 3 and what's possible on the PlayStation 3. It was a jolt to the system. I got the chance to try *Warhawk*, but my own personal opinion of it is that it's just a tech test showing what can be done with the PlayStation 3 controller. It's not really connected to what's going to make it fun or interesting.

"The most intriguing part of the PlayStation 3, to me, is the power. Sony seems to have built a racing machine with Blu-ray, Cell, and all of these things that are incredibly powerful. But even though it's powerful, there are games that will work well with the machine and games that won't. And going forward, that's something we have to think about—what game works best for each system."

HIDEO KOJIMA

Head of Kojima Productions (*Metal Gear Solid 4*), on taking you to the movies

"To refresh your memory, last year I said the PlayStation 3 was a big meal that you have once a year, the 360 was a special meal that you have on weekends, and the Revolution—as it was called at the time—was your everyday meal. Last year, it was the same family changing meals according to the situation; that was my line on it. Now, the PlayStation 3 is like a movie theater for people who want to see this movie on the big screen with THX and 5.1 audio, even if they have to pay a high price. The Xbox 360 is DVD. It could be a rental DVD or you could buy a DVD. Basically, you don't know what movie you want to see, so you go to the store and see if you can pick up a good one. The Wii is like a TV for when you're home and you don't know what you want to watch but you [want to] have that variety. So I think the three platforms are really distinctive and they mostly don't overlap each other—people who love movies watch TV all the time. We have to be very quick [with what we're doing in terms of games]. We can't wait long to turn on the

> "THE MOST INTRIGUING PART OF THE PLAYSTATION 3 TO ME IS THE POWER."

EVERYONE LOVES PS3

Most developers had nothing but good things to say about the PlayStation 3. In fact, more seemed to have a positive outlook on it than they did with the PlayStation 2 because of its raw power. Surprising, considering the new technology inside of the system.

TV, and also, the programs have to be in all varieties so everyone is satisfied, as opposed to the movie theaters, where everything has to be high spec. People want high emotions. You want to be touched by watching it on the big screen. For DVD, or the 360, you need to have a lot of variety so when people stop by they'll pick up your product. Maybe in the future, you'll see three DVDs for $10."

DYLAN JOBE

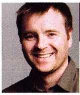
Producer at Incognito (*Warhawk*), on Sony's online service

"Sony's not going to charge you. That allows us some freedom. If, hypothetically, Sony was incredibly rigid and you had to pay for everything, then we wouldn't be able to allow gamers to host their own servers or have these more complicated network structures. Sony gives us a lot of freedom in that regard. In *Warhawk*, you can use a PS3 as a dedicated server. You'll see stats, the map, and all of that, so you can be an administrator."

DALE JACKSON

Executive producer at EA Tiburon, on the ease of development

"The PlayStation 3 is a powerful system with a lot of potential. As with all new hardware platforms, we are working hard to fully understand it and tap into that potential. To get the most out of the PlayStation 2, we had to do some very specialized coding, and now the PlayStation 3 will also require very specific code to utilize the graphics hardware and multiple processors. However, with the power of the system and the recently announced motion-sensitive controllers, [the PlayStation 3] will open a lot of design opportunities that, in the past, we could only dream of."



YANNIS MALLAT

CEO at Ubisoft Montreal (*Assassin's Creed*) on gameplay

"Everyone at Ubisoft Montreal is really excited about the PS3. The PS1 and the PS2 have revealed true long-term staying power, and we're already amazed with the results we're currently achieving on the PS3—especially with games like *Assassin's Creed*—almost one year before launch. There is no doubt in our minds that the PS3 will deliver a true next-gen gaming experience in its first year."

> "THE PLAYSTATION 3 IS A POWERFUL SYSTEM WITH A LOT OF POTENTIAL."

SHINGO TAKATSUKA

Producer at Konami (*Winning Eleven 2007*), on next-gen soccer and multiplayer possibilities

"Each person on our development team will try to improve all the aspects of *Winning Eleven* for the next generation. It all comes down to development of animation and AI. Obviously, with the next generation, consumers will expect more over-the-top emotions and graphics. But the thing is, what we do with *Winning Eleven* is focus on realistic gameplay, and our game system has to be solid and every aspect well balanced.

"We're trying to create a multiplayer system for online. You will be able to take individual positions—11-on-11 is the ideal match, [but we can't get there quite yet]. Before we do that, we'd like to provide 4-on-4 or 8-on-8."

MYTH BUSTERS

ExtremeTech's Jason Cross explains the HD PS3 situation.

"1080p over component is possible but rare. At that resolution, you're pushing the limits of component video, so bad cables, long cables, or a poor decoder chip in the TV can make the picture look bad. This is why a digital connection (DVI, HDMI) is preferred for 1080p.

Both Blu-ray and HD-DVD standards include the "image constraint token" (ICT). Movie publishers can enable ICT on a disc-by-disc basis. If set, you get the image downsampled to 960x540 if you don't have an HDCP interface to the display (on a TV, that means HDMI). No movie studio has chosen to enable the ICT on any current film shipped on HD-DVD or announced for Blu-ray, but there's nothing stopping every studio from starting to if piracy becomes rampant.

Users can expect about as many PS3 games to be in 1080p as there were original Xbox games in 1080i (maybe one or two of the least pretty games, tops, over its life span). There is not enough graphics bandwidth to draw the frame at 1920x1080. Or at least, if you did, you'd waste memory bandwidth better used for higher-res textures, and so on. The only 1080p game at E3 was *Gran Turismo HD*, which used all *GT4* PS2 assets. The PS3 will probably do as the Xbox 360 does and scale the game's true resolution to whatever the output is set for. But this doesn't actually give you any extra detail, and if the scaler isn't really good, you'll actually lose some."

THE GREAT DEBATE

THE OPM CREW CHIMES IN ON THE PS3

IS THE PLAYSTATION 3 TOO EXPENSIVE?

JOE Logically, it's not too expensive, no. You're getting a high-end media machine even at the lower level. But viscerally, it *feels* like too much.

SCOOTER On one hand, seeing a game like *MGS4* or *FFXIII* and realizing that I'm going to have to fork out, like, 800 smackers altogether, makes me (and my wallet) cry like a sad panda. But then again, I'm also a home-theater nerd who considers $600 cheap for a decent Blu-ray player, and I'm looking forward to playing both *MGS4* and a Blu-ray version of *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* on my PS3. When I buy it. In 2010.

BIANCARLO Sweet, I was hoping someone would bring up *Bill & Ted*. Anyway, I see it as this: You're essentially getting a great deal, because if you were to buy all this stuff either separately or while attempting to build a PC equivalent, you'd be paying thousands of dollars.

IS THE ONLINE SYSTEM A WORTHY COMPETITOR FOR XBOX LIVE?

DANA I'm reserving judgment till I see a bit more. I'm thrilled there's no subscription fee to play regular games online, but I'll be curious to see if Sony has problems keeping logins uncomplicated since there will be a mix of game servers with different hosts. We'll see.

SCOOTER I'm cautiously optimistic and slightly scared, because while I like the idea of free online play and a unified login, I'm scared of how there might be a whole lot of microtransactions (which were highlighted during Sony's E3 conference) on the horizon. Sure, it starts with paying $2 for a song, but at some point, you might find yourself paying 4 cents for a new bullet or 22 cents for a jaunty new hat.

JOE Bah. Microtransactions don't scare me a bit. I don't see us ever getting to the point where essentials will cost extra. And I don't see any reason why a unified login won't work across all games; yeah, the in-game interface might be different from game to game, but who cares as long as all the messaging and friend-list stuff is unified? Will the service be better than Xbox Live? I doubt it'll be significantly superior—but factor in XBL's $50-a-year subscription, and the PS3's platform looks a lot more attractive.

IS THE MOTION-SENSOR CONTROLLER A GIMMICK OR INNOVATIVE?

BIANCARLO Even if this were some lame attempt at stealing the Wii's thunder, I'm glad Sony decided to integrate the motion-sensor feature, because it'll mean we'll see at least some innovation in games beyond the standard genres. Or, at least, that's what I'm hoping.

TOM Next-gen anything should be either revolutionary or obviously evolutionary (i.e., better). Dropping the rumble feature in favor of a motion sensor feels like neither. The controller should do both! And it can, no matter what Sony says. I certainly have no doubt publishers will figure out how to use the motion sensor in creative ways. I also have a hunch Sony will figure out a way to reintroduce force feedback, with or without Immersion.

JOE When I *heard* about it, I thought: "Gimmick!" But when I *played* it, I became a convert pretty quickly. In spite of its similarities to the Wii-mote, it serves a very different function; it's about adding control, rather than completely reimagining it. I think it'll work for certain types of games, but I see it being used only in a fairly limited capacity, at least at first. Ironically, it reminds me a bit of force feedback: It enhances games without being a real necessity.

SCOOTER Alas, I haven't played with it, so I can't comment directly, but based on my cheap-armchair speculation, I'm still in the "gimmick" camp. What interests me the most is that no matter what Sony says, there is a very real public perception that the "DualTilt 3" only has tilt and no rumble, while the Wii has tilt, rumble, and a freaking speaker. But then again, Sony might introduce the "DualTilt Rumbotron attachment" or something later on.

DANA I don't think we'll find out if it's a gimmick or not till the second generation of games—since no one knew about it till the press conference, almost any interaction in the first generation of games is going to look pretty shoehorned in. But regardless of what happens with the tilt, I really, really, really hope Sony adds the rumble back in. And if it doesn't, you can bet that Logitech will make a killing on its PS3 version of the rumble-included Cordless Action controller.

WERE YOU IMPRESSED BY THE GAMES?

SCOOTER While the games do look pretty good in general, only a few of them feel "next-gen" enough to justify the price and damage to your electric bill. But then again, I personally think there are only, like, two launch titles (at most) per system that are actually good, so just the fact that there are more than two launch games I'd want to play is something I give Mr. Sony and his boys credit for.

> WILL THE SERVICE BE BETTER THAN XBOX LIVE?

JOE The games are more potential than reality at this point, I think. To me, they don't look *that* much better than Xbox 360 games...but remember that 360 developers have had a year's head start. So while right now they may look only marginally better, I'm pretty confident that next year we're going to see some really amazing stuff on the PS3...stuff that you just won't see on any other system.

TOM Call me shallow, but overall what I've seen has honestly impressed the hell out of me. *Assassin's Creed*, *Army of Two*, *Heavenly Sword*, *MGS4*, *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance*, *Indiana Jones*, even *Virtua Tennis*! But it's also true that these are mostly first-gen games (and Xbox 360 ports), and with the exception of the graphics, they still all seem like they won't play too differently from current PS2 games. Look, none of us can imagine yet what developers will pull off on the PS3, but it's such a powerful machine, I suspect we're in for some fun times. Note to Microsoft: special thanks. With all the ports planned, you've basically doubled the PS3's launch roster. Keep up the good work, at least until you can no longer keep up.

BIANCARLO Tom you're shallow. While I was impressed by bits and pieces of the PS3 library, particularly *Heavenly Sword*, *Assassin's Creed*, and *Warhawk*, I generally had a lukewarm attitude to the same thing. I mean, it's great that these games are visually awesome, but do I want to pay $600 for a first-person shooter that provides the same experience on the PS2 or on the 360? Give me more original and innovative games, people.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

If you haven't already exhausted yourself on the topic of the PlayStation 3, be sure to share your thoughts with us at opm@ziffdavis.com or at our website at opm.1up.com.

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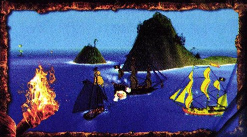

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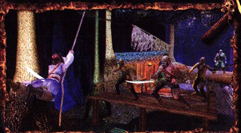

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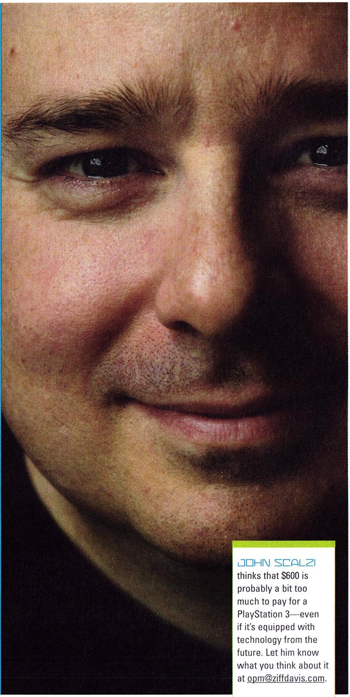
THE BIG PICTURE

BY JOHN SCALZI



JOHN SCALZI thinks that $600 is probably a bit too much to pay for a PlayStation 3—even if it's equipped with technology from the future. Let him know what you think about it at opm@ziffdavis.com.

Photo: E. Hardesty

STICKER SHOCK

A couple of months ago in this space I talked about the idea of Sony's fighting two battles with the PS3: one for dominance in the gaming console world and, with its Blu-ray DVD capability, one for dominance in the next-generation DVD area. At the time I expected the PS3 (which analysts had predicted as costing $800 to manufacture) to come in at around $400, and I wrote:

> *"Sony paying $400 dollars a machine to corner the next-generation gaming market? Expensive. Paying $400 a machine to corner the next-generation gaming market and the next-generation video market? Still expensive—but not stupidly so. Sony is looking to kill two birds with one costly stone. It could pay off."*

There's just one problem: At E3 we found out that the PS3 is going to cost $600, not $400. Oh, there's a "cheaper" $500 version, but that version has a smaller hard drive, no built-in Wi-Fi, and critically, no HDMI output—which means that while the $500 PS3 will play Blu-ray discs, you won't get the eye-blisteringly gorgeous 1080p resolution all good gamers dream of without MacGyver-like trickery. Maybe this won't matter to you if you don't plan on getting an HDTV until the very last minute. But the fact of the matter is, if you want the PS3 with all the goodies, you're paying $600. No ifs, ands, or buts about it.

To say this came as a sticker shock is understating the case. After formally introducing the PS3 at E3, Sony spent the rest of E3 trying to justify the cost. Meanwhile, the idiotically named Wii from Nintendo dropped in with its funky controller and a likely $250 (or less) price tag; it suddenly looked like a cheap, fun date. The Wii was the wiinner (sorry) at E3; Sony, on the other hand, suddenly looks vulnerable because it let the talking points get away. Can Sony get back its mojo before November?

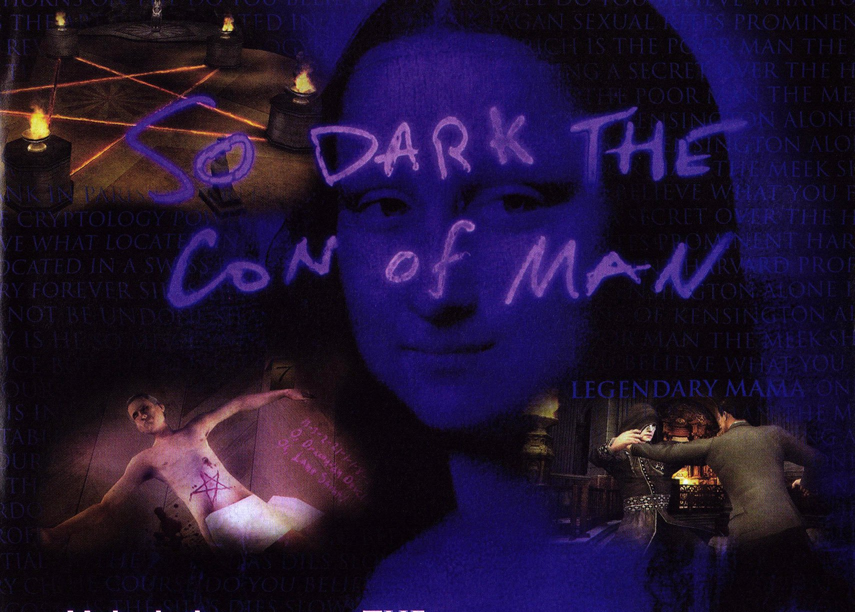
AFTER FORMALLY INTRODUCING THE PS3 AT E3, SONY SPENT THE REST OF E3 TRYING TO JUSTIFY THE COST.

Yes. Even at $600, the PlayStation 3 is a good deal...*if* you look at it as a game console and a next-gen DVD player. (And if it ships with a full Linux install, as rumored, it also becomes a full-fledged computer, which makes it an even better buy).

But if Sony is going to make this work, it needs to understand that it has, in fact, put a big-ass hobble on its own feet with the $600 price tag. That's not "Hey, I've got that in my pocket" money; it's not even "I had to eat ramen for a week but it was totally worth it" money. It's "I'm shelling out a paycheck here, and you damn well better justify this investment" money.

If I were running Sony, this is what I would do:

1. Breathe down gamemakers' necks to have a few dozen *truly* excellent games ready to go at launch.
2. Breathe down movie studios' necks for several dozen truly excellent Blu-ray releases ready to go at launch.
3. Tell my marketing people that if they're *not* positioning the PS3 as a next-gen DVD player to the people who *don't* give a crap about game playing, they can treat themselves to a hot lunch in the commissary before hitting the road.
4. Most importantly: fake a little humility. Even at $600 a pop, Sony is going to sell millions of PS3s. Most gamers have the money, and there are millions of PS2 players who don't want to see their library of games go out of use when they switch up to the next-gen console. But Sony needs to not treat this as a given—otherwise it *won't* be. A $200 gap between the Xbox 360 and the PS3 (and a likely $350 gap between the PS3 and the Wii) is a great opportunity for people to give up on the PlayStation brand.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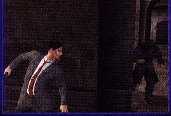

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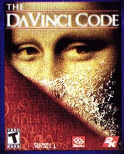

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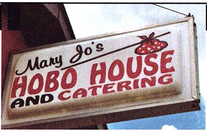
GTA CRIME SPREE

ROCKSTAR'S SERIES SPEEDS INTO THE NEXT GENERATION

OK, we all pretty much saw this coming, but during E3, Rockstar Games confirmed that *Grand Theft Auto IV* would, in fact, be released on the PlayStation 3 and is currently scheduled for release in October 2007. Naturally, there aren't any details available on the game, how it plays, or even where it takes place, but we've come up with a few ideal locations on our own.

LOCATION:
BRITT, IOWA

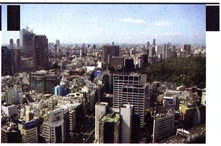


Why: Well, if you know what's special about Britt (you know who you are), then you can see ample justification for a *Grand Theft Auto* game taking place there. First of all, it's the location of the Hobo Museum. Secondly, it's, er, the location of the Hobo Museum, so there'll be a lot of hobos to be sure, and what would a *GTA* game be without hobos?

LOCATION:
NOME, ALASKA

Why: In *Vice City*, the big new innovation was motorcycles. The only thing that could possibly top that is the addition of dogsleds and the jacking of them. Also, the idea of being chased by a police dogsled with its siren blaring while riding a sled you just stole sounds too good to pass up, frankly.

LOCATION:
TOKYO, JAPAN



Why: This is a little more serious than the other selections, if only because fans of the series have been waiting quite some time for it. Plus, Rockstar has some competition now that Sega's *Yakuza* game is shaping up to be one of the bigger releases of this fall. Also, we need only say one word to explain what would make *GTA: Tokyo* cool, and that word is: ninjas.

LOCATION:
CHRISTMAS ISLAND, AUSTRALIA

Why: We didn't actually know Christmas Island existed until we searched for wacky and zany places on the Internet, but we were hoping that Rockstar could do a Christmas-themed version of *GTA* complete with a Santa Claus gang, reindeer jacking, and Christmas carols. Of course, none of this actually makes sense since Christmas Island has a tropical climate, but who said anything about making sense?

LOCATION:
ATLANTIS

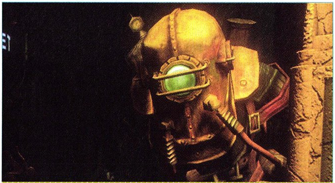
あのような輩をこの宮殿に

Why: Um, everyone knows that it's better down where it's wetter. How cool would it be to play a *Grand Theft Auto* game that takes place completely underwater? Maybe not, but that should totally be the next premise for an *Aquaman* game, since Aquaman is the greatest underwater superhero to ever live. Plus, it sure would make for some great musical numbers.

PLAYSTATION BITS

BYTE-SIZED NEWS

Blu-ray movies will finally be hitting store shelves in June, so you'll have plenty of content for your PlayStation 3. And we suggest waiting for the PS3, since the cost of **Blu-ray players** has been topping the $1,000 mark.... Elsewhere, we hope you're ready to rock with Activision, which recently purchased RedOctane, publisher of the ***Guitar Hero* series**. Please, please, please, Activision, for all that is holy—don't screw this up.... In other Activision news, the company has also purchased the ***James Bond* license**, which means we'll be seeing games based on the upcoming ***Casino Royale*** movie and other *Bond* flicks. Hopefully, Activision can turn the troubled franchise around.... Across the Pacific Ocean, one of Sonic's creators, **Yuji Naka**, has left Sega and Sonic Team to form his own studio, Prope. This won't mean the end of his relationship with Sega, since it will still be publishing Naka's games, much like Clover Studio's relationship with Capcom.



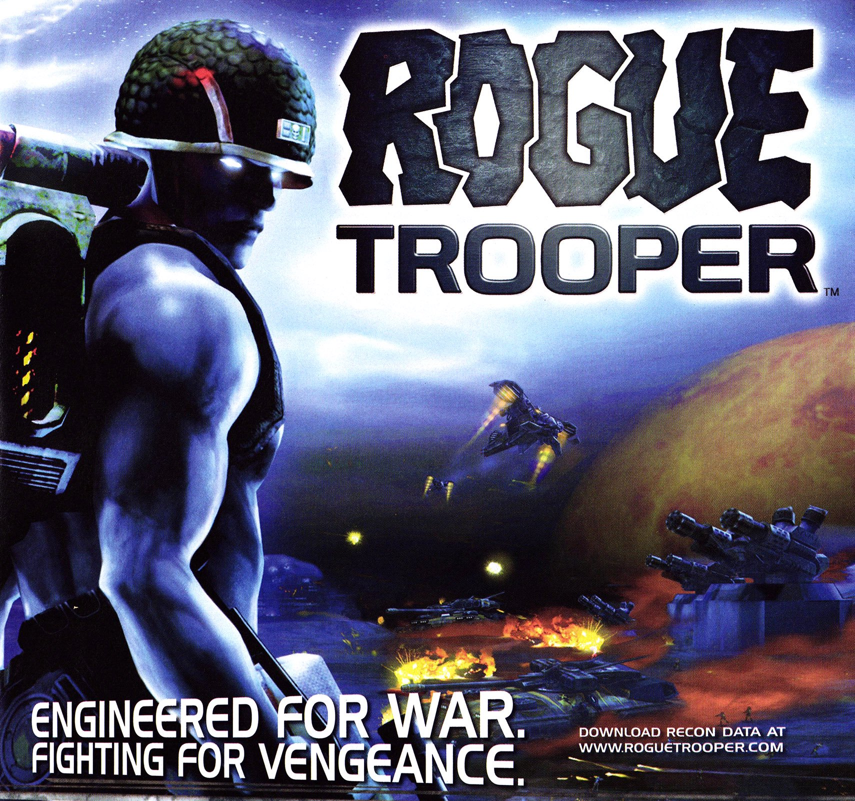
GAME ENVY

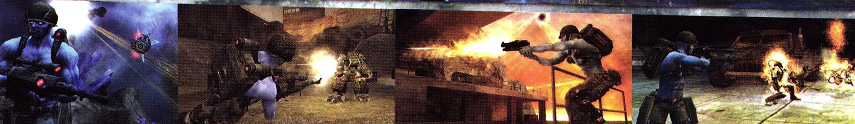
BIOSHOCK (XBOX 360, PC)

This E3 gem from 2K Games (expected on Xbox 360 and PC "for now") sports one of the most bizarrely awesome (or is that awesomely bizarre?) settings we've yet encountered in a game: an underwater society—founded by followers of Ayn Rand's objectivist philosophy—gone horribly wrong. Er, yeah.

This first-person shooter/adventure/horror game from the designers of *System Shock* is set in the 1960s; it puts you in the role of a plane-crash survivor who must solve the mystery of this elegant, extravagant, and utterly f***ed-up underwater retreat. You'll find designer drugs to make an übermensch out of you, lavish lounges strewn with corpses, and creepy little girls who shamble around drawing fluid from bodies…and drinking it.

Disturbing, yes. But the uniquely retro art style, the unusual premise, and the multifaceted gameplay have us intrigued. Survival-horror FPSes are nothing new, certainly, but the aggressive head games *BioShock* tries to play with you may prove refreshing—that is, refreshingly terrifying.





TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Use of Alcohol
Violence

PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE

PlayStation 2

ONLINE BROADBAND ONLY

XBOX

XBOX LIVE

POWERED BY gamespy

REBELLION

eidos

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Hydrating emollients and lubricants...

form an invisible layer of protection...

from the first stroke to the last.

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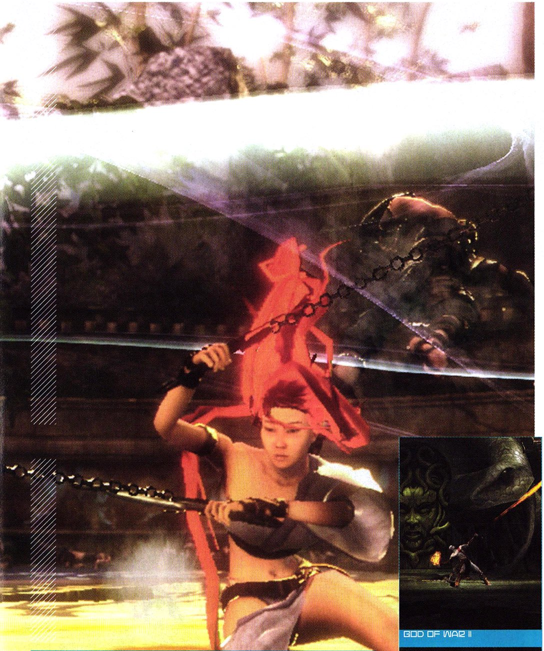
TRENDSPOTTER

CHAIN GANG

You know, if you're going to give weapons to a character, you might as well give them chains. Not only are they heavy and made of some kind of metal, but they're also suggestive of damnation and all that cool business. Really, though, we're glad that these characters are using chains because it means that the developers played *God of War* (well, hopefully, the *God of War II* guys played *God of War*), so they know what a good game is supposed to look and play like. |

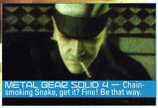


GOD OF WAR II

HEAVENLY SWORD

GENJI 2

GHOST RIDER



METAL GEAR SOLID 4 — Chain-smoking Snake, get it? Fine! Be that way.

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New Fusion HydraSoothe after shave balm with its aloe-rich formula soothes and moisturizes your face after shaving. It's a perfect finish to the best shave ever.

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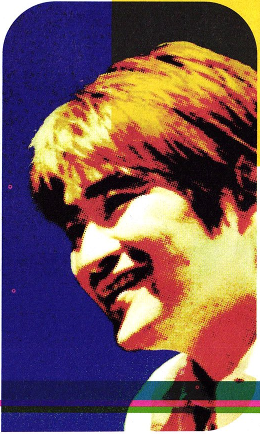
TETSUYA MIZUGUCHI

IN A TRANCE



When talking to some people, you can just tell that they love what they do for a living. Tetsuya Mizuguchi is one of these people. From his days at Sega—where he worked on high-profile arcade games and got his early start on a solo career with *Space Channel 5* and *Rez*—to the formation of his own company, Q Entertainment, Mizuguchi has enjoyed every second of his gaming career, as is evidenced by the way that he talks about his fondness for his former company and the excitement he has for his new company. His down-to-earth attitude has seemingly put him in closer touch with his fans and fans of games in general, a type of closeness that becomes increasingly rare in the gaming industry with each passing year. Listening to him speak will easily remind even the most jaded gamer why he or she started playing games to begin with.

RÉSUMÉ

- *Sega Rally* (1995, Arcade)
- *Space Channel 5* (1999, Dreamcast)
- *Rez* (2001, Dreamcast, PS2)
- *Space Channel 5 Part 2* (2002, PS2)
- *Lumines* (2005, PSP)
- *Meteos* (2005, DS)
- *Ninety-Nine Nights* (2006, Xbox 360)
- *Lumines II* (2006, PSP)

DRIVING AHEAD

Mizuguchi has worked on many games (even more than those listed to the left), but it's great to see how his style has changed and evolved over the years. It's also worth pointing out that he really didn't start doing music-oriented games until he was named head of the Sega's United Game Artists studio.

OPM Did you ever in your life imagine that you'd be at this point in your career?

TETSUYA MIZUGUCHI No, not at all. When I joined Sega, it was 1990. I graduated from my school, and I was thinking about my future, so I studied about the arts—media art and the media. Now, the computer culture is coming into the media in every direction. At the time, I could see the vision [of where I was going]. But the game industry at the time, consumer gaming, was just starting with 3D graphics.

I went a few times to SIGGRAPH, the computer-animation expo, and I saw my future. I really wanted to make something, combining some essence of picture and sound. But the game technology at that time was poor, especially right there in the beginning. I wanted to bond with the game and make it have [worldwide appeal]—no market, no borders, no boundaries. So there were tons and tons of freedoms [in my mind back then]. I thought of also being a filmmaker or music maker.

OPM When you were a student, did you already know what types of games or experiences you wanted to create?

TM I had this vision, but it wasn't clear to me at the time. I figured out in the first generation that I was influenced by music videos from MTV. I was so shocked the first time that I watched them—like A-ha's "Take on Me" and Peter Gabriel's "Sledgehammer." [*Laughs*] That was kind of the smallest part of the creative influence. And I found out that these [videos] had this great expression, and I wanted to make it so you could interact with them—making the music, sound, visuals, and story all come together. I did that with *Rez*, but then I also added the vibration.

Then I joined Sega. Sega made the great arcade games—that was the reason I chose [the company]. I didn't look at any other of the videogame companies, like Namco. I just wanted Sega.

OPM Back then, it seemed like Sega was also at the forefront of 3D graphics. The company had come out with the first *Virtua Fighter*. Did you feel like that Sega was ahead of everyone else at the time?

> "I MET THIS GUY, THIS OLDER MAN, NAMED YU SUZUKI."

TM Before 1990, there was no video technology like that in the game industry. I used to watch the big arcade machines, like the big one that turned 360 degrees. And I thought, "Wow, what is this? Who made this?" So I saw the logo for Sega on it, and I didn't know much about Sega before that—just that it was a game company.

I met this guy, this older man, named Yu Suzuki. He's kind of a father of the Sega *OutRun* team. He's such a nice guy. He helped Sega in the arcades and basically created the vision. Anyway, he approached me and taught me about the high-end technology being used for games,

TALKING THE TALK

One of the many great things about Tetsuya Mizuguchi is that he rarely relies on a translator to help conduct his interviews. Nearly all the time, he answers questions himself in English, which is a pretty rare thing among Japanese developers—most will only answer through a translator. And when he does speak in English, you can hear how much thought he puts into his answers and how strongly he feels about everything that he's saying. It's easy to see why he's such a big hit among even the most jaded gamers. We just wish there were more developers like him in this industry.

and I had some knowledge about CG at the time. So [I] thought to myself, "OK, [I'll] join Sega.

At that time, there were no job titles like [there are nowadays]—you were a programmer or you were a designer, and that was it. There was no director, no producer, no creative director. So after I joined Sega, at first I tried to figure out my title—who am I, that kind of thing. Suzuki-san gave me two or three years to figure this out, so I'm grateful for him and for my time working at that company.

OPM So how did you find what your title was? How did you decide whether you were a designer or a producer?

TM I wanted to make entertainment, not only games. At the time, to me, the games looked very poor. I have something and want express something, but how do you do that with such weak hardware? So anyway, my first job was to create the CGI movies for Sega's simulator. I met a few people—CGI programmers and CGI artists—and I was on a team within Sega with high-tech people. But none of what we were creating was interactive. And everyone else was doing an interactive job.

That was just a really big experience for me. Eventually, I felt like I was ready to make a game; at the time, I thought, "OK, I should create a game." And at that point, yeah, it was easy to gather the people who have the really good skills.

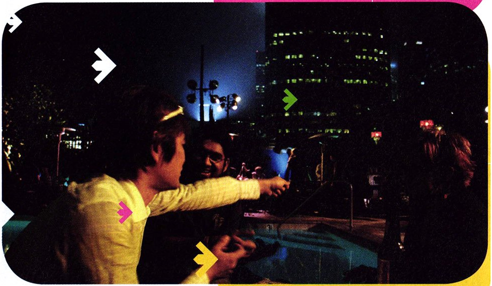
OPM How much of an influence did working on those first few games have on the way you design games today? When you play those games now, do you look back and see how things have changed in how games get made?

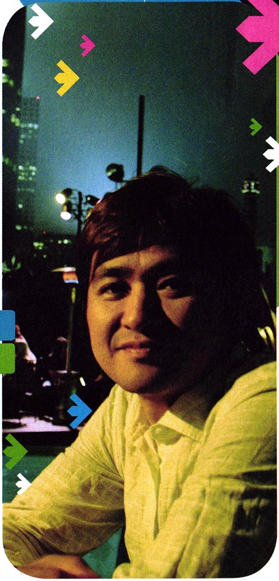
TM Making games is not so complicated. If you have the vision and the image—a clear image—it's easy. But it depends on your clear image. You can gather people, technology, time, and money, but you need that image. With my first image, I didn't know how we could create this kind of thing, but…yeah, that was an experience. [*Laughs*] When creating something, somebody needs to control the vision. If the vision is unclear, then you can't create it.

OPM You mentioned that music videos had an impact on you. What else has had an impact on your own personal style, your own sense of what looks good and what's entertaining?

TM I watch HD movies. I just saw the *Resident Evil* movie on HD-DVD at a friend's house. So I'd watched this movie two or three times before. But seeing it again in high-def made me feel excited; it felt fresh. It was like it was a new movie. It was such a revolution, such a big impact—you think, "Wow." It was a big surprise. I knew it would look good, but it means I'll be buying many, many, many movies again. [*Laughs*] That was such an upgrade.

This is [the nature of human beings]—we have the senses, the emotions, and we always need new entertainment to live. It was the same content at a different resolution, but I felt it was a new direction in entertainment.





OPM Something similar to that: A lot of people think that Sony is taking that same approach with games. It's kind of the same experiences that you had on the PlayStation 2, but now it's with better graphics and much higher resolution.
TM Right, right...

OPM So do you think that's what Sony is doing with the PS3? And do you think that people will see the better graphics and be so entertained that they'll just go rush out and buy one?
TM Yeah, it's so good.

OPM There's just an inherent appeal, that people just want that visual upgrade?
TM This industry is changing, but it's just beginning to make this change. I think that for the first 20 years—the same with the movie industry—the first era in this industry didn't exactly change. We openly talk about game design, but game design is "invisible design." It's like the bones in the human body. Everyone can watch the muscles; the muscles are kind of like the visuals and sound. You could make a game that just goes with visuals or sound, but then there's no point. You need the structure of the bones if you want to flex the muscles. It's a balance, but the structure and the shape of the bones changes and has been changing. We should all be designing around the bones.

Obviously, we discuss this a lot. And now we're moving and we're growing and talking about high resolutions, but we should never forget the bones.

OPM At E3, you're really seeing a lot of games that focus on crowd interaction and reactions that bystanders have to the main character. Do you think that we'll get to the point where games will be online and actual people will control the NPCs?
TM I watched the demo of *NBA Live* at this year's show. And all around the court, there were all the people watching from the edges of the court. So maybe here's a guy in the audience watching the game, maybe he's living in Tokyo and watching the match and screaming something, that kind of thing. It may be too soon for that kind of technology, but if we can manage something like that, it would be a new form of game.

> "THIS INDUSTRY IS CHANGING, BUT IT'S JUST BEGINNING THIS CHANGE."

OPM As we speak with some Japanese developers, they seem to think that North American and European developers are now the premier developers. Meanwhile, the Japanese developers are having problems creating new worlds because the Japanese market demands

sequels, and so people can't really create original games anymore. Do you agree with that?

| TM No, I don't think so. Games make money in every direction, including mobile games and consoles, but they're not the same. The game coming out for the PSP isn't the same as a game coming out for the Xbox 360. For console games, the big games, it takes a lot of people and time, so making games for consoles is really, really risky [financially]. Everyone needs to be willing to take more risks—so maybe you say, let's use some famous intellectual property or sequel or the big management idea. I'm always trying to come up with the fresh and new IP. For me, the new IP is a big project, but I don't think it's dangerous [financially]. We have the clear vision, the good management—and the management is key. I need many people. There's some guy working on the visuals at one company, another guy working on multiplayer, and that sort of thing. But I don't want to be forced to do that within the company.

If you don't have that kind of environment, that's OK. But most of the companies are trying to hire just within the company. This is a very small world, [so you don't have to do that]. [In my current position at Q Entertainment], I get more of the freedom because I don't have to do that. If I want to hire people, I don't want to work within a company. I can move things faster. We have to change the form, so we need much more collaboration. We need to be worldwide, because you can even use the Internet to conduct meetings or to send data through FTP [servers].

| OPM In one of your blog updates, you wrote that you were writing from the *Pokémon*-branded airplane. And that seems to be the way things are now—you have to be able to work from anywhere.

| TM Yeah, you do. [*Laughs*]

| OPM How do you personally feel about people who are asking you for sequels all the time?

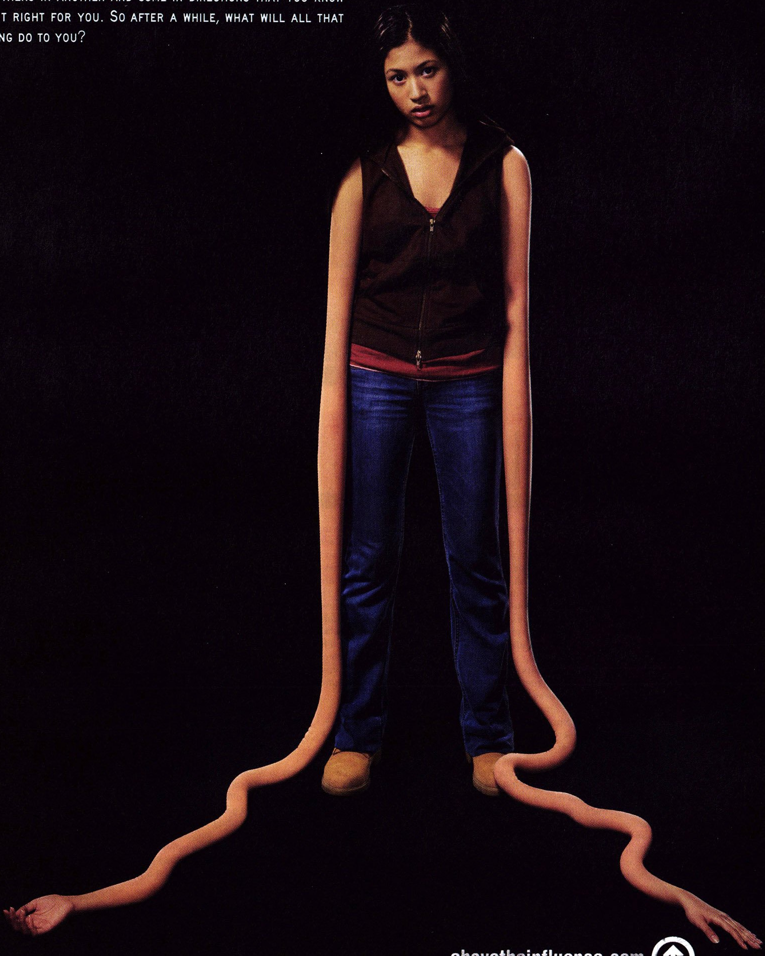
| TM My own personal feeling is that I want to make sequels, like what we're doing with *Lumines*. I think sequels are great.

> "I WANT TO MAKE SEQUELS. I THINK SEQUELS ARE GREAT."

| OPM Is there anybody that you'd like to collaborate with on a project?

| TM It's controversial to do collaborations. Plus, I'm in Japan, and I would like to do a lot of collaborations with U.S. people. Not only game designers—I'd like to work with music people, like [Japanese musical group and *Lumines* soundtrack contributor] Mondo Grosso, but for something like a sequel to *Rez*. I'd also like to be able to work with more actors. I've always enjoyed the chemistry that takes place between music and people. |

THEY'RE GONNA PULL ON YOU—SOME PEOPLE IN ONE DIRECTION, AND OTHERS IN ANOTHER AND SOME IN DIRECTIONS THAT YOU KNOW AREN'T RIGHT FOR YOU. SO AFTER A WHILE, WHAT WILL ALL THAT PULLING DO TO YOU?



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JAPAN IS CRAZY
James Mielke's podcast session with International Manager Ryan Payton (on the right) direct from the Kojima Productions offices in the tony Roppongi Hills section of Tokyo.

Artelligent City
Roppongi Hills
FACILITIES
GRAND HYATT TOKYO
ROPPONGI HILLS RESIDENCE
KEYAKIZAKA COMPLEX
TOHO CINEMAS ROPPONGI HILLS
ROPPONGI HILLS ARENA
TV ASAHI
ROPPONGI HILLS GATE TOWER
MORI ARTS CENTER
ROPPONGI HILLS

J-TOWN

IN THE MIX

You may remember *OPM*'s Hideo Kojima cover story a few months back (OPM101, February 2006), in which we ran our superlong, in-depth conversation with the legendary director that revealed everything anyone needed to know about the mastermind behind *Metal Gear Solid*. To help celebrate this great circle we call life, I'm gonna tell you a little bit about my recent trip back to Kojima Productions, where we recorded a podcast about my previous visit to interview the Big Boss. So when you think about it, this is me writing about a podcast in which we talked about a previous issue of *OPM* in which I wrote a big article. That's like making a game based on a movie based on a game—but hey, I'm just the messenger.

Konami's Japanese development headquarters are ensconced in the luxurious new Roppongi Hills complex in the Roppongi district of Tokyo, and while I find the area to be cheesy (due to the high percentage of foreigners—go figure; I'm xenophobic in a foreign country), there's no denying that the Roppongi Hills complex is swank. After shopping at the nearby, übertrendy Hysteric Glamour boutique, I made my way to the reception desk to meet up with my contact, International Manager Ryan Payton, a former Ziff freelancer but now an up-and-coming young superstar at Kojima Productions (he's from the States, but speaks fluent Japanese; it helps).

After I got my visitor's badge, I made my way up to some double-digit floor and headed through the Kojima Productions floor, where multiple teams were working on various games, like *Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops, Lunar Knights, Metal Gear Solid Digital Graphic Novel*, and of course, *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*. Naturally, I was encouraged to not look around too closely (yeah, right!), since I might see something I wasn't supposed to see, as we made our way to the sound booth, where Ryan and I would chat—with Kojima's blessing—about *OPM*'s Kojima cover story and 1UP.com's *Metal Gear* cover week.

As a former radio DJ (so it was in college—shut up), I was impressed with the quality of Kojima Productions' audio-recording setup. "Of course it would be top shelf!" I thought to myself; this is Konami's most storied development team, so they're bound to have the goods. Without getting too technical, there's a big difference between just listening to a CD on your stereo and hearing the same song on the radio. The radio version always sounds more exciting, because most radio stations use something called an "exciter" to add some reverb and other effects to the broadcast, giving it more of a live feel. This works in regular conversations, too, like when you listen to Howard Stern. He sounds like he's in the same room with you, and so it was with our oversized headphones and our all-around rambling. I was tired, suffering from the *Lost in Translation* effect also known as "jet lag." So while I was sleepy as hell when Ryan interviewed me, we sounded great. Exhausted, but great.

> THIS IS KONAMI'S MOST STORIED DEVELOPMENT TEAM, SO THEY'RE BOUND TO HAVE THE GOODS.

Since very few people get to witness the inner conclave of Kojima Productions, you're just gonna have to take my word that it's very cool to be able to cruise through the offices, watching dozens and dozens of people at work crafting the games that will define the next generation. If you can, I recommend sifting through the archived English podcasts at the KP website and soaking in all the stuff revealed in these informal chat sessions. It may help pass the time between now and when *MGS4* and *Portable Ops* come out, or it may not. But if you're dying to get a little bit closer behind the scenes, what have you got to lose? | James Mielke

You can find the weekly Kojima podcasts (in English!) at www.blog.konami.jp/gs/hideoblog_e. And check out 1UP.com's *Metal Gear* cover story at metalgear.1UP.com.

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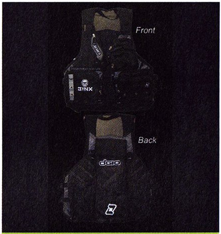
FEEL

TOKIDOKI

www.tokidoki.com

While iPods are pretty stylish in their own right, we can't help but think that some people may want to customize them so they stand out from the endless sea of other iPods floating around out there. (And no, we don't just mean those leather cases, which are pretty bland.) Thankfully, Tokidoki has come up with some pretty cool skins to slap on your iPod that will not only protect, but will also up the awesomeness of your iPod.

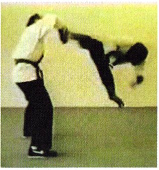


JINX FLIGHT VEST

www.jinx.com

You know what would be really cool? If your first thought was "wearing a flight vest while playing something like *Ace Combat*," then give yourself a high five, because that's totally what we were thinking too. We probably wouldn't be caught dead wearing this thing outdoors, but if you tell people that you're trying to get in touch with your inner Maverick, then they might be a little more understanding.

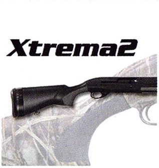
SEE



MONKEY FU

www.youtube.com

Did you ever see *Bloodsport*? Remember that one guy who would roll around on the ground and kick the big sumo dude like he was a monkey? Well, this is kind of like that, only it's an actual monkey doing the fighting. This is bad news, people: Who knows what this monkey will do when he gets back into the wild? He may teach these secrets to other monkeys, and then we'll all be totally screwed. Get ready to welcome the monkey overlords.

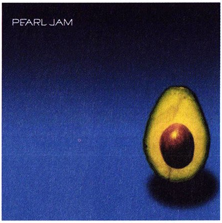


BERETTA XTREMA

video.google.com

We're not so much promoting the gun in this video as we are the man in it. Sure, an automatic shotgun with no kickback is pretty awesome, but the fact that this guy hits every target while doing an assortment of moves with scatter shot is pretty darn impressive. Plus, there's one point where he even uses one hand—and one hand with a shotgun is really, really crazy if you're into that sort of thing. And really, who isn't into awesome shotguns?

LISTEN



PEARL JAM

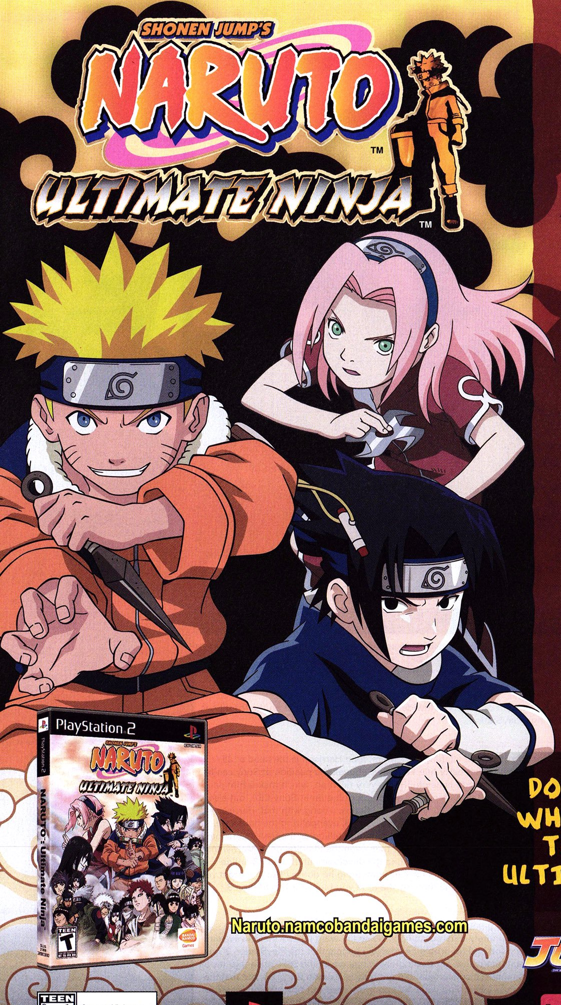
www.pearljam.com

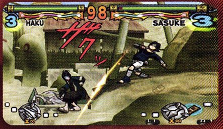
Remember Pearl Jam? They're back, in pog form! Just kidding, of course. All of the kids who grew up in the grunge rock era of the 1990s will surely recognize the name Pearl Jam—the band behind such uplifting tunes as "Jeremy." Even though the band has been relatively quiet the past few years, its new self-titled album is right in line with the original sound, so go pick it up. If you don't, you might make Eddie Vedder cry.

SIMPLE MINDED WAY

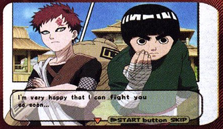
www.thelongshadows.com

Want to know what *OPM* columnist and Gin Blossoms lead singer Robin Wilson has been up to these days? Then you should check out *Simple Minded Way*, the debut album from The Longshadows, which is one of Robin's new projects. It's supergood stuff, but you don't have to take our word for it: Go for a listen at the group's website. And no, we're not biased about this just because we know him—we wouldn't promote this if it wasn't good.

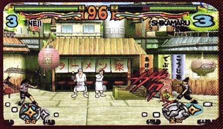

SHONEN JUMP'S
NARUTO™
ULTIMATE NINJA™
PlayStation 2
SHONEN JUMP'S NARUTO ULTIMATE NINJA
NARUTO: Ultimate Ninja
TEEN
BANDAI NAMCO Games


3
HAKU
98
SASUKE
3

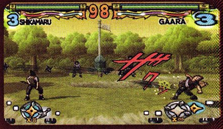
Increase your chakra and unleash multi-level super attacks to ascend the ranks and become a full-fledged ninja.


I'm very happy that I can fight you so soon...
START button SKIP

Fight as one of over 12 playable characters to complete missions and unlock tons of bonus content.


3
NEJI
96
SHIKAMARU
3

Switch between 12 interactive stages mid-combat while performing powerful ninjutsu moves as seen in the hit television series.


3
SHIKAMARU
98
GAARA
3

Use a variety of weapons, close combat or call on support characters to assist with super attacks or drop off power-ups.

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BECOME THE ULTIMATE NINJA?

Naruto.namcobandaigames.com

TEEN
Cartoon Violence
Suggestive Themes
Use of Tobacco

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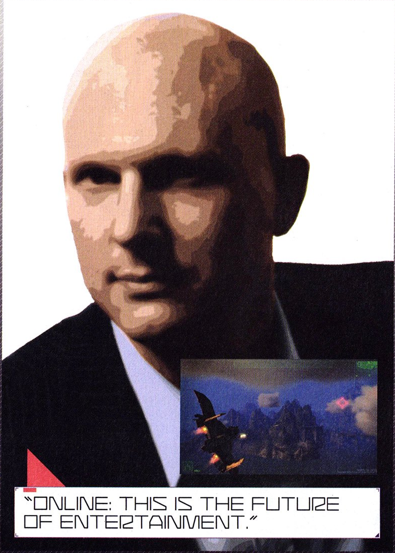
Our annual Power 20 list of the most important people or influential innovations wasn't as easy this year. You'll notice that there are more representatives from Sony as it prepares to launch the PlayStation 3. You'll also notice that some notable names that made the list last year did not make it this year because they're either a little too quiet on what it is that they're working on or that they're working on a different platform. Either way, here it is. Power 20, we salute you.

OPM POWER 20

THE 20 MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE AND INNOVATIONS



"ONLINE: THIS IS THE FUTURE OF ENTERTAINMENT."

ILLUSTRATION: SEAN DALLASKID

PHIL HARRISON

WHO IS HE?

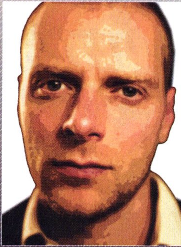
He's the president of Sony Worldwide Studios and the general on the front lines of all things PlayStation.

LARGER THAN LIFE

If Kutaragi is in charge of all things hardware, then Harrison is the head of all things software (like first-party title *Warhawk*, above). His position at Sony can be equated with his tremendous height. He's a very tall man, which makes him perfect for overseeing not only the internal projects going on at Sony CEA, but also projects around the world at Sony's various studios. Along with that, Harrison's also the unofficial spokesman for the PlayStation 3, evangelizing the hardware, explaining what the heck the Cell processor is, and telling all the developers that the PlayStation 3 is easier to develop for than even the PlayStation 2. More importantly, Harrison has the task of overseeing the development of the PS3 online service as well. So chances are if he sees something he doesn't like in current versions of the service it won't be there by the time you buy your PlayStation 3.

A HARD SELL

Talking about how great the PS3 is in terms of hardware and software is one thing, but it's an entirely different thing to do so knowing the price of the system. Previously, Harrison had no problems showing people that the PlayStation 3 was capable of great things, but are these great things worth the $600 price tag? It's up to Harrison to convince consumers that not only is it worth the price, but that the system will deliver everything you could possibly need out of a gaming machine. It won't be an easy task, to be sure, but Harrison seems like he's more than ready to take on the challenge of selling a high-end console to the masses.



JOHAN KRISTIANSSON

WHO IS HE?

He's leading the graphic-technology charge as the CEO of Starbreeze.

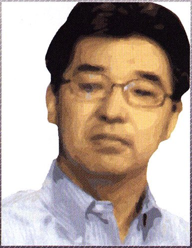
IT DOES GET DARK IN SWEDEN

The development team behind surprise Xbox/PC hit *The Chronicles of Riddick* is hard at work on a launch title for the PS3 based on the comic property *The Darkness*.

LET'S MOTOR!

Starbreeze, which is an independent studio, has a leg up on most of the developers shooting to get their game out for launch: The engine powering *The Darkness* was built for *The Chronicles of Riddick*. Since the team doesn't have to build all the tools from the ground up like many other developers are doing, they'll be able to spend more time finessing the game's look. *Riddick* put a spotlight on Starbreeze, and *The Darkness* could be the game that officially establishes it as one of the industry's premier development studios.

"THE CELL PROCESSOR WILL CHANGE THE CONCEPT OF PROGRAMMING."



MASA CHATANI

WHO IS HE?

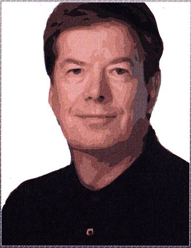
He's Sony's chief technical officer, which means he comes up with a lot of the cool stuff.

A SURROGATE FATHER

If Ken Kutaragi is the father of the PlayStation, than surely, Chatani is its cool uncle...or something along those lines. You see, while Kutaragi comes up with many of the technical ideas for all of the PlayStation units from the PSX to the PSP, Chatani is the one who has to try and implement them. So you can imagine that Chatani has poured most of his heart and soul into the PlayStation 3 and making its hardware configuration a reality.

PAYING THE PRICE

The PlayStation 3 features top-of-the-line technology, thanks in large part to the company's design philosophy for the system—although it's coming at a price. But judging by the refinements made to the system since its first introduction, Chatani and his team went back to the drawing board to make the PS3 slightly more financially attractive.



LARRY PROBST

WHO IS HE?

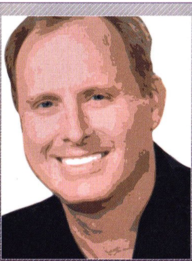
He's the ruler of the universe, otherwise known as the chairman and CEO of Electronic Arts.

KING OF THE WORLD

Despite a holiday season that was rough on sales, EA retains its position as the largest third-party videogame publisher, anchored by perennially strong franchises like *Madden* and *Need for Speed*.

GENERATION NEXT?

EA will definitely have a few titles available at the PS3's launch, and the company's reputation for technical quality (sweat engines, anyone?) is a pretty good guarantee that those games will sell well. But people seem to be getting fed up with all the sequels, as EA's sales have been declining for the past few years. What is the publisher doing to rectify the situation? EA has a few new properties in the works for the new consoles, along with a deal for Steven Spielberg to develop games. If those efforts are successful, it's likely that the company can stop the recent slide and keep its place at the top of the heap.



JOHN SMEDLEY

WHO IS HE?

The president of Sony Online Entertainment is going to help make the PS3's online gaming service a reality (and make it good).

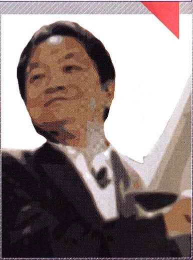
HOOK US UP

Sony Online Entertainment is providing the infrastructure for PS3's online gaming, and it will offer server hosting for companies who don't want to deal with setting up their own server network.

EVER QUESTING TO WIN

The company is no stranger to online gaming: Sony Online has had numerous big PC massively multiplayer games under its purveyance, including the MMO granddaddy of them all, *EverQuest*. Catching up to the Xbox 360 will take work—the Microsoft empire has a lot of experience with online networks—but using the resources and experience that Sony Online can bring to the table is a wise move on Sony CEA's part. Long live the PlayStation Network Platform! (Just trips off the tongue, doesn't it?)

DIGITAL OUT
(OPTICAL)



KEN KUTARAGI

WHO IS HE?

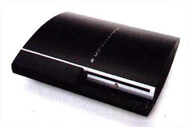
Widely recognized as the "father of the PlayStation," Kutaragi was the driving force behind the launch of the PS1 and the creation of Sony's videogame division.

WHAT HAS HE DONE FOR ME LATELY?

Kutaragi is still the man with the PlayStation plan, driving the launch of PS2, PSP, and...

PS3?

Yes. Like a proud papa, Kutaragi has been showing off and talking up the PS3 to anyone willing to listen, throwing out such mind-boggling hyperbole as his claim that the system will usher in the era of "4D" entertainment. But with the introduction of the motion sensor controls, that statement doesn't seem so out of place anymore. Now if he can just get the rumble effects back in, *everyone* will be happy.



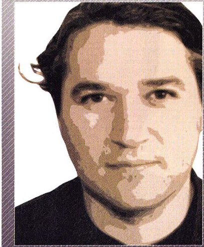
"THE PS3 IS LIKE A MOVIE YOU SEE ON THE BIG SCREEN."

HIDEO KOJIMA

WHO IS HE?
He's the director of Kojima Productions.

SO HE'S REALLY DOING ANOTHER MGS GAME?
Yes. Even though he likes to say that he won't be doing another *MGS* game, he listens to his fans and ends up doing what they want. Though with the way *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* is shaping up, it looks like this might truly be the last *MGS* title. But then again, we said that about the last game, too.

IS HE A FAN OF SNAKES ON A PLANE?
We can't say for sure, but knowing Kojima, we can safely assume that *MGS4* will have plenty of homages to movies both new and old. Two other things you can always count on with Kojima: that he's willing to take weird chances, and that his game will look like the trailer. To the first point, Kojima isn't afraid of doing things like messing with the fourth wall in *MGS*, switching the main characters in *MGS2*, adding elements like food and camouflage to *MGS3*, and even making GBA games that utilize actual sunlight (*Boktai*). To the second, think of how awesome the *MGS4* trailer is. Now think back to every time Kojima has shown a trailer of any *MGS* title. Even *MGS2* had that awesome trailer with scenes like Metal Gear Ray tearing stuff up. The trailer was hard to believe at the time, but *MGS2* came out and, in fact, looked just as good as the trailer. *MGS3*? Quite possibly the best-looking game on the PS2. Fact is, Kojima and his team know how to develop for Sony's hardware, and we're confident that *MGS4* is going to introduce some even quirkier and more interesting gameplay concepts. And not only will it look as good as the trailers, but it might be *the* PS3 game to beat visually.

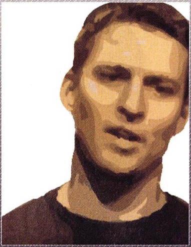


SETH LUISI

WHO IS HE?
The producer of the *SOCOM* series made online gaming viable on PS2.

IS SOCOM STILL GOING?
You bet your sweet ass it's still going. In fact, Luisi and *SOCOM* developer Zipper are currently readying new *SOCOM 3* maps for download—they should be available by the time you read this. Zipper is also readying the fourth title in the series for release this fall; *Combined Assault* will introduce four-player co-op mode to the series.

WHAT ABOUT A SEQUEL?
Luisi has revealed that the team is working on a PS3 game that will be "a pretty drastic departure" from the current *SOCOM* incarnations. Since this is the franchise that launched the PS2's online initiative, we can expect to see Luisi and his team push the envelope of online play.



DR. RICHARD MARKS

WHO IS HE?
The creator of the EyeToy, which revolutionized gaming control.

WAVE YOUR HANDS IN THE AIR!
While Dr. Marks' brainchild may be currently underused, the EyeToy nevertheless offers a tantalizing glimpse of the possibilities for unusual game interfaces. And at Sony's E3 press conference, Marks' *Eye of Judgment* demo made use of a newer, fancier camera. No one would call it the EyeToy 2, but we think it's just a matter of time.

THE FUTURE IS NOW
While Nintendo's uniquely interactive Wii controller certainly owes a debt to the EyeToy, it's the PSP and PS3 possibilities that have us excited. Announcement of a forthcoming PSP camera brings Wi-Fi-based video chat and augmented-reality gaming well within reach, and combining the EyeToy concept with the power of the PS3 makes more precise spatial recognition feasible.

> "I THINK GAMES CAN BE THE NEXT GREAT ENTERTAINMENT MEDIUM."

TED PRICE

WHO IS HE?

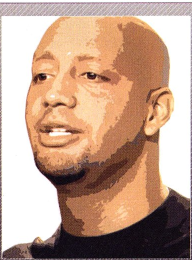
Ratchet's daddy and president and CEO of Insomniac games looks to start anew on the PS3.

JUMPING FOR JOY

The creator of both the *Ratchet & Clank* and *Spyro the Dragon* franchises, Insomniac has a long, illustrious history of making wildly entertaining platform games.

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

So it comes as a bit of a shock to see that the company's first PS3 game, *Resistance*, is a dark, horror-based, first-person shooter set against the backdrop of 1940s Earth during an alien invasion. So, basically, World War II never happens and the remnants of humanity are left to fight the chimera (the name of the alien race) invasion. It's certainly darker than *Ratchet & Clank* and hopefully signifies a new era in Insomniac's design philosophy.



JASON HALL

WHO IS HE?

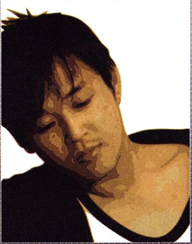
He's senior vice president of Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment.

DIDN'T HE FINE EA OR SOMETHING?

Well, kind of. He is the same fellow who said that if a game based on a Warner Bros. property doesn't meet a certain score threshold, the developer gets significantly less money in royalties. Basically, he—like a normal gamer—realizes that licensed games tend to suck, only he's in a position to do something about it.

CINEMA VERITÉ

On top of being the ultimate overseer of licensed games such as *Superman Returns* and the next *Harry Potter* game, Hall is also ultimately responsible for WBIE's own titles, which include *Dirty Harry* (for PS3), *Justice League Heroes* (PS2 and PSP), and *300: March to Glory* (PSP). Now we'll see how his own company does when adapting licensed IP to game form.



TETSUYA NOMURA

WHO IS HE?

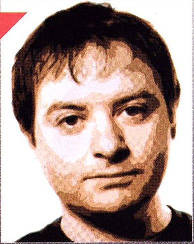
He's the director of little games such as *Kingdom Hearts* and *Kingdom Hearts II*, as well as director of the *Final Fantasy XIII* compilation.

HOW DID HE BECOME KING OF THE CASTLE?

Well, being the major character designer for the one RPG that the PlayStation world fondly recalls (*FFVII*) helps. It also helps to be the director of two games that float off the shelves in a fit of Disney magic.

OK, BUT SORA HAS HAD HIS WILD RIDE, SO NOW WHAT?

Well, Nomura is still the mastermind behind the Compilation of Final Fantasy VII, so things like *Dirge of Cerberus* and *Crisis Core* are under his purview. And for next-gen games, well, he's the big man on campus for *Final Fantasy XIII*. Since *Final Fantasy* has the power to influence the playing habits of small nations of gamers, it's safe to assume that everyone will be watching how he handles the series' jump to the PS3.



DAVID JAFFE

WHO IS HE?

He's the creative director for Sony's Santa Monica studio and an avid blogger.

PLAYING GOD

Overseeing the work of a studio that's produced such mammoths as *God of War* is a big job, but so far Jaffe has proved himself up to the task.

SMOOTH TALKER

Whether he's calling out game journalists on his blog or expressing his doubts about what games are capable of, Jaffe is known as a man who's not afraid to speak his mind. It's a candor that's refreshing in a community not known for publicly admitting that some areas could be improved. After the critical and commercial success of *God of War*, people are watching closely to see what Jaffe will be up to next. His strength as a developer is in finessing gameplay to be as fun and as streamlined as possible, and he has been very vocal about his desire to see games have more emotional impact by virtue of increased interactivity; it will be interesting to see if this is reflected in the products coming from the Santa Monica teams. While Jaffe's primary focus is directing the PSP title *HL*, he's also the studio's head guy, so he'll give his input on everything being done there. And despite Jaffe's uncharacteristic silence on the topic, it's very likely that he's somehow involved in the production of a next-gen game as well.

> "PS3 DEVELOPMENT IS RISKIER BECAUSE OF THE MONEY INVOLVED."

TIM SWEENEY

WHO IS HE?

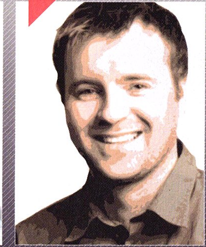
Sweeney is the founder and president of Epic Games, and its technical director/engine guru.

WHY IS THIS PROGRAMMING GEEK ON THE LIST?

Well, because this programming geek is the main architect behind the Unreal Engine, which happens to be the engine that powers a whole lot of PS3 games. A short list to give you an idea: *Assassin's Creed*, *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway*, *Indiana Jones*, *Stranglehold*, *Turok*, and *Unreal Tournament 2007*.

OK, SO WHAT DOES THE UNREAL ENGINE 3 ACTUALLY DO?

Well, it pulls off various graphical tricks like per-pixel lighting, real-time self-shadowing, shader models, and normal mapping. The engine also has built-in support for that newfangled PhysX physics chip, which makes it easier for developers to build games of graphic excellence that model real-world physics. In other words, they're going to look *awesome*.



YANNIS MALLAT

WHO IS HE?

He's the recently named CEO of Ubisoft's renowned Montreal Studio, the folks responsible for the acclaimed *Prince of Persia* and *Ghost Recon* series, among others.

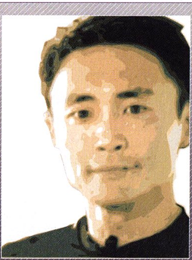
WHOA, THAT'S A GOOD RÉSUMÉ

It's getting better. Mallat is leading the division's 300-plus designers, artists, programmers, and producers in Ubisoft's bid for the next-gen crown. We've already had a glimpse into how that lead may take shape: An early look at *Assassin's Creed* impressed the *sacré bleu* out of us.

WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT IT?

Its *Prince of Persia*–meets–*Thief* sensibility, set against a backdrop of a massive and vivid world (the action-adventure takes place during the Crusades), is one of the first examples we've seen of next-gen gameplay. *Assassin's Creed* serves as notice to other publishers that the bar has been raised—high.

ASSASSIN'S CREED



KAZUNORI YAMAUCHI

WHO IS HE?

He's the brilliant head of Polyphony Digital, where he's designed and produced all the games in the legendary *Gran Turismo* series (aka *Sony's License to Print Money*).

WHAT'S DRIVING HIM?

Sony's strength is in its broad range of popular brands, and chief among them is *Gran Turismo*. We know that Polyphony is busy at work on *Gran Turismo 5* for the PS3, and while Sony ain't talking details just yet, we're certain that *GT5* is going to be most amazing driving game ever.

BUT DIDN'T YOU SAY THAT ABOUT GT4?

Well, at least it has the chance. While we patiently wait, we can stay seated with the recent *Tourist Trophy* (which we think was a hint that motorcycles will be a big feature in *GT5*) and the long-awaited *Gran Turismo 4 Online* for the PS2.

THE WII CONTROLLER

WHAT IS IT?

It's that crazy looking controller that Nintendo came up with for its new system, the Wii.

LEADING THE REVOLUTION

Yes, it's from Nintendo, but the Wii controller has already had a huge impact on the PlayStation world. For one thing, the new PlayStation 3 controller features motion sensor technology similar to that of the Wii—although not to the same extent—and so many developers are looking for new and creative ways to take advantage of the technology. Frankly, this is great for Sony since it will simultaneously encourage PlayStation 3 developers to also look at ways on how to use these new motion sensors.

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

We hope the Wii controller continues to influence the PlayStation 3 controller. After all, the PS3 controller currently is without a rumble function, something that the Wii controller makes full use of and in a great way. But Sony's never been one to take a backseat to any company in the pure technology department, so it's probably only a matter of time.

DAVID LAU-KEE

WHO IS HE?

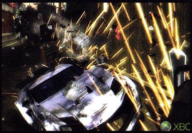
He's the CEO—nay, the very rich CEO—of Criterion Software.

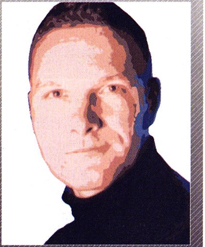
HE'LL PROVIDE THE TOOLS

You might know Criterion primarily for the *Burnout* games, but its RenderWare engine technology will be more important than ever for the next generation of consoles. With development costs soaring and more and more time being spent on research and development, preexisting engines such as RenderWare will only make it that much easier for developers to come to grips with the new hardware until they can come up with their own tools. Plus, Electronic Arts is relying heavily on RenderWare for its next-generation games, and it doesn't get much bigger than that.

YOU'LL PROVIDE THE TALENT

Of course, having the tools to construct a game doesn't mean the game will automatically be good. While developers like Criterion and some of EA's internal studios have the talent to use RenderWare effectively, most others have had trouble with it or have used it as an excuse to get shovelware out the door.





JULIAN EGGEBRECHT

WHO IS HE?

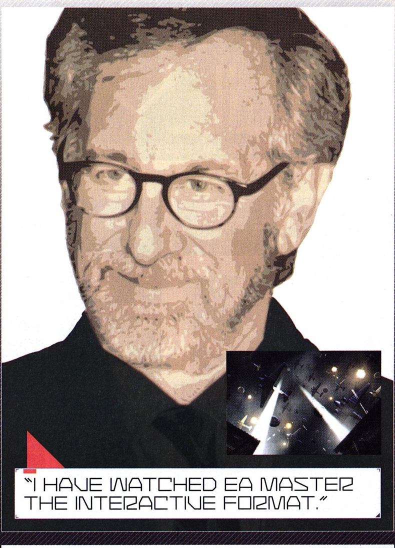
He's the founder and president of Factor 5, one of the marquee GameCube developers that jumped to the PS3.

JAPANESE PARTS, GERMAN ENGINEERING

There's no question that Factor 5 is the technical whiz kid of the industry. Eggebrecht and his team were able to accomplish some amazing feats on the GameCube hardware, some of which have yet to be matched on any other platform. The fact that the studio is working on the PlayStation 3 is great for Sony because if any developer is going to create a showcase game for the system, it's Factor 5. And from the looks of *Lair*—its first game—the company is well on its way to doing just that.

MORE THAN ROGUE SQUADRON

One thing Factor 5 has to prove is that it can do something outside the *Rogue Squadron* formula of gameplay, and while *Lair* has shown similar gameplay elements, we hope that the team introduces some new stuff that we haven't seen in these types of games before.



"I HAVE WATCHED EA MASTER THE INTERACTIVE FORMAT."

STEVEN SPIELBERG

WHO IS HE?

He's the most successful filmmaker of all time.

OK, LET'S BUILD ON THAT

Not even God can match Steven Spielberg's filmmaking prowess. The prolific director of pretty much all of the most popular movies ever (*Jaws*, *E.T.*, *Indiana Jones*, *Jurassic Park*) is responsible for nearly $4 billion in gross box office receipts in the United States alone. His four Oscars, including the Irving Thalberg Memorial Award (given for lifetime achievement), bear proof that he's far more than a blockbuster machine—he's actually well respected.

Yet it's all apparently not enough for the Eagle Scout. In search of bigger fish to fry, Spielberg is leading the recent migration of film biggies (notably Peter Jackson and James Cameron) to the greener pastures of...videogames.

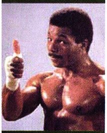
THAT'S ALL VERY NICE, BUT CAN HE MAKE GAMES?

Yeah. In fact, Spielberg has been involved in games since the early 1990s, when he talked his good friend (and videogame company owner) George Lucas into making a graphic adventure for LucasArts called *The Dig*. From there, Spielberg's DreamWorks SKG (the studio he cofounded with David Geffen and Jeffrey Katzenberg) started development on EA's *Medal of Honor*, the highly acclaimed World War II FPS that sparked a wildly successful series (and subgenre) that's still going strong with this year's *Medal of Honor Airborne* (pictured above). Last October, EA announced an extraordinary deal in which the company's Los Angeles studio will produce three original game concepts from Spielberg, while Spielberg retains the rights to turn the concepts into feature-film or TV projects. While further details of the long-term agreement have yet to surface, we're pretty sure this "collaboration," as EA puts it, will yield something pretty amazing.

JULY 06

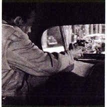
THE MONTH AHEAD FOR YOU AND YOUR PLAYSTATION

SUNDAY



16

Apollo 11 launched on this day in 1969 and would eventually land on the moon, where it would fight Apollo Creed in one last boxing match before retirement.



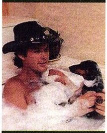
23

Los Angeles denizens can check out the **Flaming Lips** at the Hollywood Bowl. Or they could sit in traffic and shoot each other.

MONDAY

10

Celebrate July 11 tomorrow with **free Slurpees** for everyone at 7-11! Yay, brain freeze!



17

Do you know of anyone else who can look at home wearing a Crocodile Dundee hat and holding a wiener dog while sipping a beer in a bubble bath? Neither do we. Happy 54th, **Hoff**!

TUESDAY

NEW GAMES

04

It's the 4th! Celebrate the birth of your nation like it does—by blowing stuff up!

11

We know we'll be speeding ***FlatOut 2*** have us some ***Super Monkey Ball Adventures*** today.

18

We'd say something clever about ***Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth***, but we're sure all those articulate *FF* fans have that covered.

25

Tekken: Dark Resurrection comes out—just in the nick of time to send out Anti-Boredom Month!

NEW GAMES

WEDNESDAY

05

Dolly the sheep was cloned 10 years ago. We're not morally opposed to cloning as long as there is never a clone made of Billy Crystal.

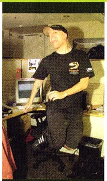
12

The **Medal of Honor** was established by Congress in 1862, which is, coincidentally, the exact same number of games in the *MOH* series!

26

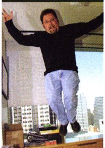
Psychonauts creator and all-around crazy man **Tim Schafer** turns 39 today.

THURSDAY



13

Quit trying to be cool—because, honestly, you're not pulling it off. That, and it's **Embrace Your Geekness Day**.



20

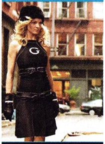
According to the founders of **World Jump Day**, if 600 million people in the Western Hemisphere jump at 11:39:13 GMT, the earth will be knocked from its orbit. Or at least, that's what we told Tommy B.

FRIDAY

NEW FLICKS

07

We don't know about this dead man's chest in the new ***Pirates of the Caribbean***, but we're definitely looking forward to Keira Knightley's.



21

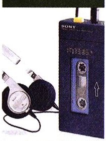
Hell hath no fury like a woman who's also a superhero scorned in ***My Super Ex-Girlfriend.***

28

If Michael Mann had asked us, we would have picked a different '80s TV show than ***Miami Vice*** to remake. Sadly, we're still waiting for someone to make *Charles in Charge: The Film.*

NEW FLICKS

SATURDAY



01

Your parents thought the **Walkman** was the height of technology when it came out in 1979. Mock them. Then imagine what your kids will say about the PS3.

15

Fail to embrace your geekness two days ago? You've got a second chance: It's **Be a Dork Day**.

29

The Fellowship of the Ring was published in 1954, which has led to 50 years—and counting—of dogs named Frodo.

THE PLAYSTATION UNDERGROUND: ARE YOU MISSING SOMETHING?

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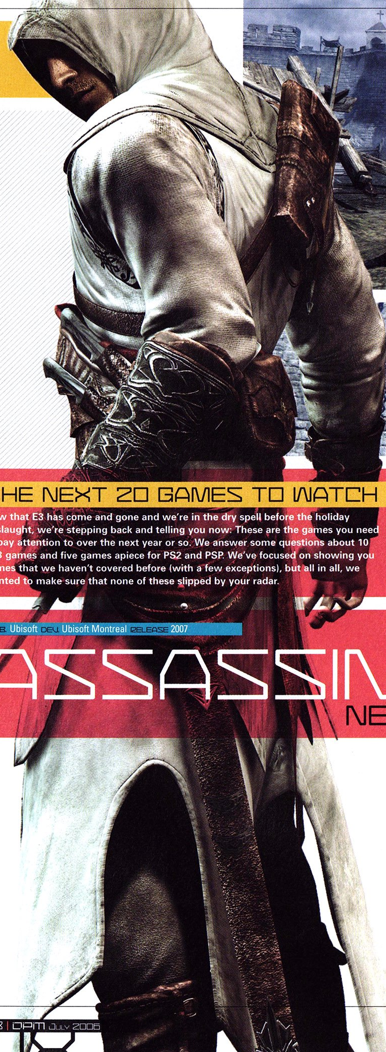
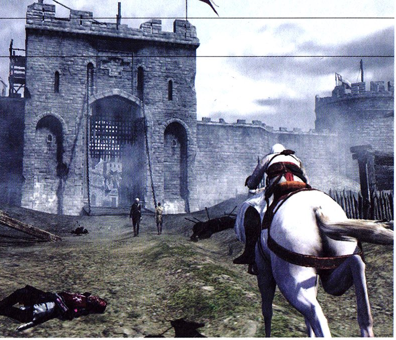
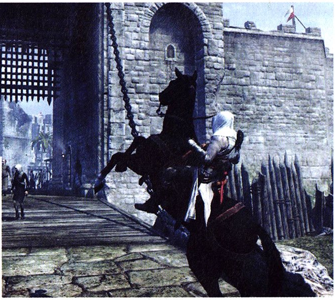






THE NEXT 20 GAMES TO WATCH

Now that E3 has come and gone and we're in the dry spell before the holiday onslaught, we're stepping back and telling you now: These are the games you need to pay attention to over the next year or so. We answer some questions about 10 PS3 games and five games apiece for PS2 and PSP. We've focused on showing you games that we haven't covered before (with a few exceptions), but all in all, we wanted to make sure that none of these slipped by your radar.

PUB. Ubisoft DEV. Ubisoft Montreal RELEASE 2007

ASSASSIN'S CREED

NEXT-GEN NECK-STABBING

WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

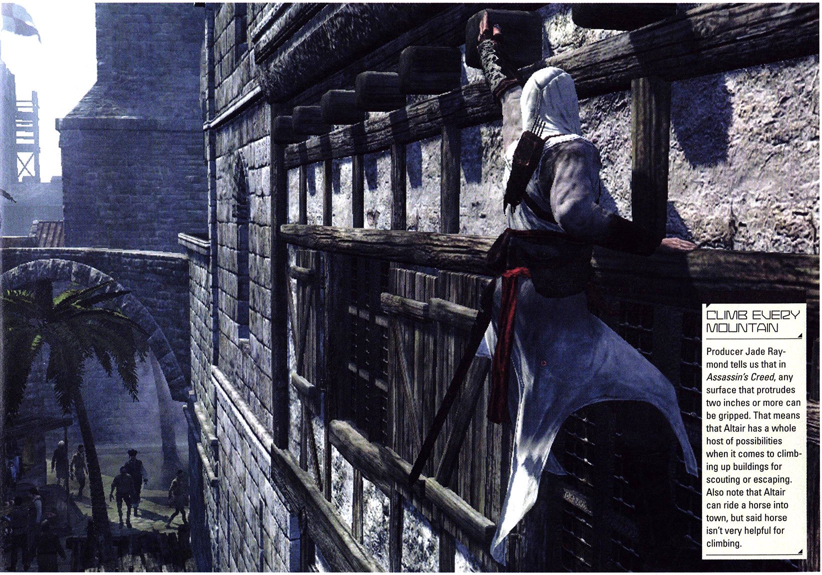
Take *Hitman*, add a dash of *GTA*, mix in the feel of *Prince of Persia*, and sprinkle in the look of *Thief*. Not to say that *Assassin's Creed* is unoriginal. The idea of having the player control a member of the fabled *Hashshashin* (a secret Muslim order from the 8th century, reputed to have been the first assassins' guild in history) during the Crusades is a new spin on a somewhat tired "play a badass assassin!" genre.

WHO'S MAKING IT?

The same talented crew behind *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*. While Ubisoft Montreal has worked on both the *Prince of Persia* and *Splinter Cell* titles, those were created with help from other studios. But the core *Sands of Time* team focused on making not only next-gen graphics, but "next-gen gameplay."

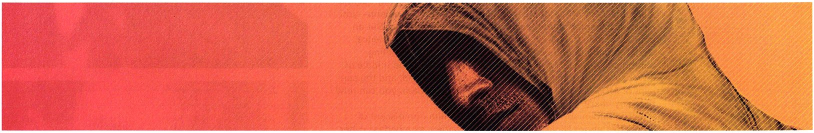
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

First off, these are real gameplay screens. So the team has the "next-gen graphics" down. For gameplay, they've done something pretty interesting: make a stealth game without shadows. The stealth is based



CLIMB EVERY MOUNTAIN

Producer Jade Raymond tells us that in *Assassin's Creed*, any surface that protrudes two inches or more can be gripped. That means that Altair has a whole host of possibilities when it comes to climbing up buildings for scouting or escaping. Also note that Altair can ride a horse into town, but said horse isn't very helpful for climbing.



on people, specifically the crowds. Think about how you move around in a crowded place and subtly use your hand on people's shoulders to guide them away from you. That's one way Altair, the main character, weaves his way through the crowd—he can also simply shove people aside when he's on the run. Also, Altair can perform side missions to help out different factions. When helping the local monks, Altair can use the fact that his white hood and garb resemble a monk's robe to blend in with a group of chanting monks right in front of a pursuing guard. Help burly bandits, and they'll part to let you pass while also crowding up to block pursuers. Additionally, Altair's movements are based on *le parkour*, or free running, which is a European trend where people simply get from point A to point B in the fastest manner possible, using all sorts of climbs, jumps, and sprints. Entire cities (three are named: Jerusalem, Damascus, and Acre) are now playgrounds where Altair can climb, leap, and stalk his prey. Finally, we have the assassinations themselves—in one mission Altair takes out William de Montferrat in Acre. Producer Jade Raymond comments that "Altair" is Arabic for eagle, and that the assassination is to be carried out like an eagle: Scope the terrain, sweep in for the kill, and then quickly fly away. Altair heads to the town square where Montferrat is hanging some prisoners, and has him jump down and make his way to the pavilion. After stabbing Montferrat in the neck (portrayed as three dramatically captured still frames), Altair races through the crowd, but alas, he's caught by the guards and stabbed repeatedly.

THE STEALTH IS BASED ON PEOPLE, SPECIFICALLY THE CROWDS....

IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

Not much, except when Altair gets caught, the screen suddenly turns white and displays the words "genetic memory retrieved," followed by what looks like a surgeon peering down at you. Raymond mentions some kind of conspiracy that ties in with the modern world. We just hope that this modern stuff isn't a silly dream sequence, and that it stays in cut-scenes while the game stays in the Crusades. |

METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

A SNAKE PRETENDING TO BE AN OCTOPUS, HUH?

PUB. Konami DEV. Kojima Productions RELEASE 2007

WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

Finally, a true sequel to *Metal Gear Solid 2. Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* was a damn good prequel that shed light on some mysteries from both *MGS1* and *MGS2*, but there was still too much stuff unresolved from *MGS2*. No. 1 on the list: What's the deal with Ocelot and his arm being Liquid Snake? Series creator Hideo Kojima promised that *MGS2* and *MGS3* would each be his last *MGS* game, but he promises that this is really is the last one. Seriously. Storywise, we know that Snake meets up with Otacon and Roy Campbell and is called to the Middle East to confront Liquid Ocelot once and for all.

WHO'S MAKING IT?

After teasing fans that he'd retired from the series after *MGS3*, Kojima and his team are once again taking care of Snake, who's aged rapidly due to imperfect cloning technology and is now "Old Snake." Also of note is the presence of codirector Shuyo Murata, who worked on the fantastic *Zone of the Enders 2* and also did the Guy Savage minigame in *MGS3* (you know, the creepy dream sequence). Since Kojima's team squeezed out an amazing-looking jungle for *MGS3*, we can be fairly confident that they'll do similarly awesome work on the PS3.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Er, well, it's the next *Metal Gear Solid*. Even with a choppy framerate, the trailer's still one of the best-looking things on the PS3 to date. Kojima declined to talk about gameplay much, and we figure that he'll wait until either Tokyo Game Show 2006 or even E3 2007 before showing real in-game stuff—the trailer he showed at E3 this year was focused on establishing the mood and setting of *MGS4*. For example, the dominant theme is the use of private military contractors (Outer Heaven turns out to be the largest PMC in the world) and the increasing control of the private sector in war. A lot of *MGS3*'s story dealt with the nature of patriotism, and *MGS4* presents a stark contrast to that: The PMCs are so powerful that conflict is now based on business and profit instead of nationality or patriotism.

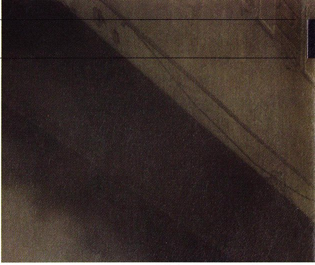
> MGS4 IS STILL ONE OF THE BEST-LOOKING PS3 GAMES.

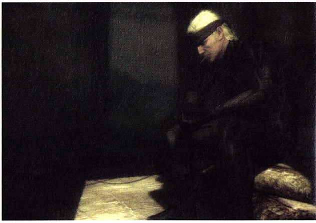
One thing Kojima did show in the trailer was a new gameplay mechanic known as "Octo-Cam": When Snake leans against a wall or lies prone on the ground, his camouflage suit automatically changes color to conceal him with whatever he's touching. Kojima elaborates: "In *MGS3*, the camouflage was like a chameleon—you selected the color of your skin to match the background. But an octopus is able to change both its color and its texture—hence, Octo-Cam. In previous *MGS* games, you were always hiding behind something, but in *MGS4*, you're dropped in the middle of a war zone. There might not be a wall to hide behind, and the concept of *MGS4* is 'no place to hide,' so with Octo-Cam, you can now hide anywhere."

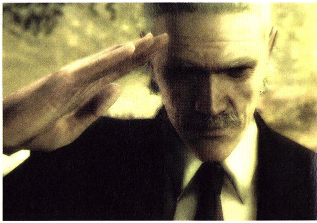
Also, Raiden appears in the trailer in a scene reminiscent of Gray Fox/Cyborg Ninja in *MGS1*, where Raiden, as a badass cyber ninja, takes out a large group of Metal Gears. Kojima comments: "Raiden is actually a popular character in Japan—but obviously, he wasn't very popular in Europe or the U.S. I don't think his character was well translated back in *MGS2*, so we didn't change his character; we've changed your perception of his character. By making him look cool but also unplayable, you watch him and you go, 'Ah, I want to play as Raiden!'"

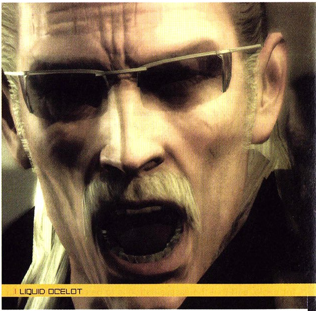
IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

Not much—except for, well, the actual game itself. And the ever-present concern that a *Metal Gear* title's talk-to-game ratio will lean heavily toward the "talk" side.

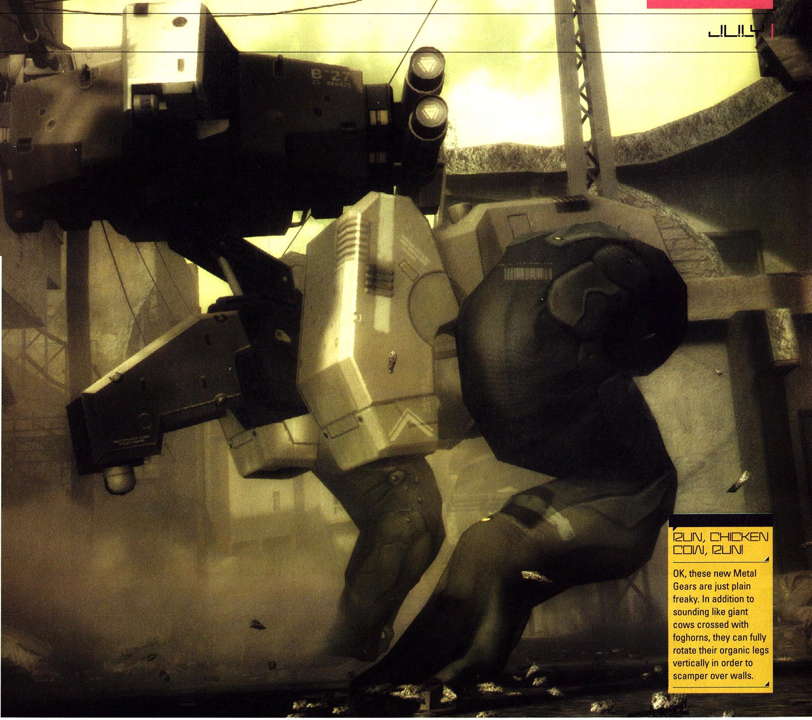






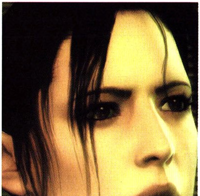


LIQUID OCELOT

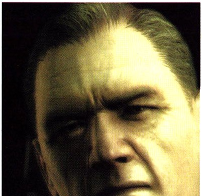


RUN, CHICKEN COW, RUN!

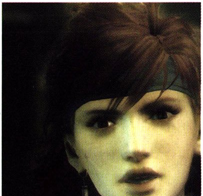
OK, these new Metal Gears are just plain freaky. In addition to sounding like giant cows crossed with foghorns, they can fully rotate their organic legs vertically in order to scamper over walls.



NAOMI HUNTER



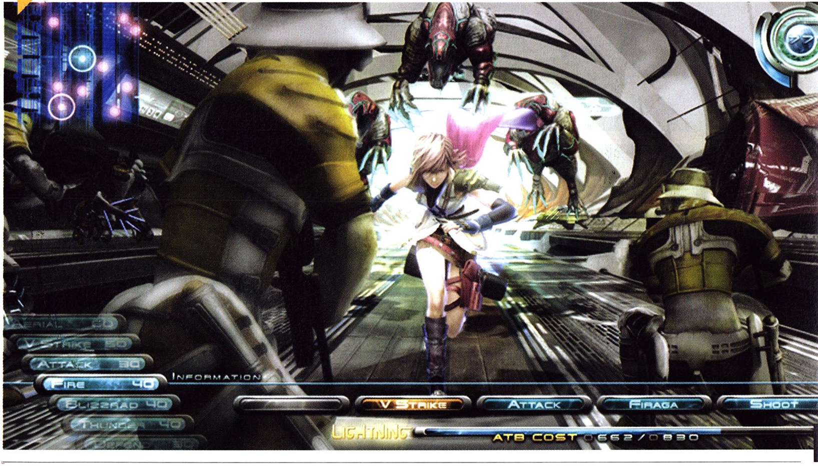
ROY CAMPBELL



MERYL SILVERBURGH

RAIDEN

FINAL FANTASY XIII


Aerial 20
V-Strike 50
Attack 30
Fire 40
Blizzard 40
Thunder 40
Information
V Strike
Attack
Firaga
Shoot
Lightning
ATB COST 0662/0830

PUB. Square Enix DEV. Square Enix RELEASE TBA

FABULA NOVA CRYSTALLIS FINAL FANTASY XIII

TWO XIII'S FOR ONE PS3

WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

Remember the Compilation of Final Fantasy VII? Four releases, all centered on the lore of *FFVII*? The last piece of that collection finally arrives next year (see *Crisis Core* on pg. 70), so Squenix thought it would do a similar compilation for the next *Final Fantasy* title, *FFXIII*. We have no idea of the meaning behind the compilation's name, "Fabula Nova Crystallis" (other than it being Latin for "the new tale of the crystal"), but we can confirm that it comprises at least three titles: *Final Fantasy XIII*, *Final Fantasy Versus XIII* (both for the PS3), and *Final Fantasy Agito XIII* (for cell phones, which are apparently way popular in Japan). Since *FFVII*'s compilation has four titles, we're assuming that a fourth *FFXIII* title will be announced later.

THE PS3 IS GETTING NOT JUST ONE, BUT TWO FINAL FANTASY TITLES....

WHO'S MAKING IT?

Think of Squenix's two biggest PS2 games in the States. We're talking *Kingdom Hearts II* and *Final Fantasy X*. Well, those two teams are each working on a respective *FFXIII* title. Yoshinori Kitase and his boys from the *FFX* team are tackling *FFXIII*; they apparently started basic work on the game after wrapping *FFX* and started full-on production after creating (and then shelving) the *FFVII* PS3 footage shown at last year's E3. Tetsuya Nomura and his teams from both *FFVII: Advent Children* and *Kingdom Hearts II* are working on *Final Fantasy Versus XIII*.

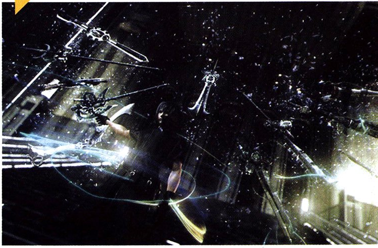
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Er, the fact that the PS3 is getting not just one, but two *Final Fantasy* titles right off the bat. So far, Squenix seems to be emphasizing *FFXIII* itself, as the company has shown the most of that one. Understandable, since it's probably in a more complete state (since the team's been working on it since *FFX*, as opposed to Nomura's team, which probably started work on *Versus XIII* after the recently released *KH2*). Not much has been shown of either game, but we can pick up a few details. *FFXIII*'s trailer featured a very sci-fi look with futuristic monorails and armor-clad soldiers wielding guns, as opposed to the more medieval-fantasy style of previous games. Also, *FFXIII* seems to feature a female main character; most of the footage featured her taking down several soldiers with stylish gunshots and combo attacks. This footage looks like a typical high-quality Squenix CG cut-scene until you notice the slight jaggies on her skin and the preponderance of numbers and onscreen icons, indicating that the battle is taken from real-time gameplay. Other than showing a woman taking down dudes and wandering around some nice-looking environments, the trailer gave no details. Even less was shown of Nomura's game, which only had a dude with black clothes (and a haircut suspiciously resembling Nomura's) challenging a whole bunch of soldiers and then conjuring up magical swords to circle around him. Oh, and Nomura hinted that his title will feature "extreme-action gameplay."

IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

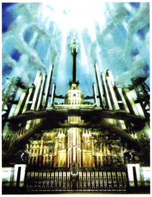
The most obvious thing to be concerned about is that Squenix didn't give any real details about either game. That, and the fact that the company still hasn't finished the *FFVII* compilation. So who knows how long it'll take to finish *FFXIII*? Or, as we see it, *FFXIII*, *FFXIII-2*, *FFXIII-3*, and so on....

FINAL FANTASY VERSUS XIII



AGITO ERGO SUM?

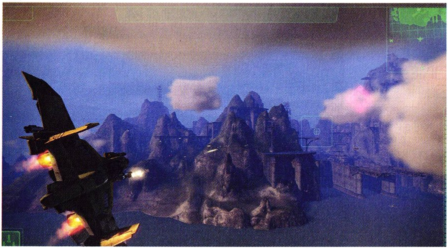
Squenix is still being vague, even about the cell phone game, but we can at least say that "agito" means "to put in motion," and that director Hajime Tabata plans to use the cell phone network as link for online co-op play.



PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Incognito RELEASE Launch

WARHAWK

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE



WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

Take what you know of the original *Warhawk* on the PS1. OK, now amplify those features and graphics by 1,002, add in a bunch of new features that never appeared in the original game, and you've got *Warhawk* for the PlayStation 3. In fact, there's such a huge difference between this game and the original PlayStation release that the development team could've easily gotten away with not even calling it *Warhawk* at all.

WHO'S MAKING IT?

If you need to make a *Warhawk* game, why not tap into the talent of some of the members of the original SingleTrac development team who are now working at Incognito? Well, that's what Sony's doing, and from the looks of it, Incognito is well on its way to capturing the magic that made the original game so great. But the new stuff the team is integrating fits incredibly well into the *Warhawk* universe—so much so, in fact, that you'll wonder how the original release got along without it.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

THE FIRST AND ONLY PS3 GAME TO USE THE TILT.

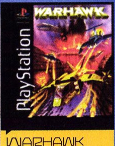
In a lot of ways, *Warhawk* just as a game is a big deal. It's the first and only PlayStation 3 game so far to use the motion-sensor technology of the PlayStation 3 controller, and there's a good reason for that. Incognito was actually anticipating such a feature, so the development team went ahead and put it in the game. When Sony's Japanese office contacted Incognito shortly before Sony's E3 press conference to reveal that the PS3 controller would include this feature, everyone on the team was quite pleased.

As far as the actual gameplay goes, it's quite a bit different from the original *Warhawk*. For one, the game takes place in a persistent world with "ambient warfare." Essentially, you can be flying along, take notice of a battle going on in the distance, and choose whether or not you want to engage or continue with your main objective. Additionally, you can even get out of the main vehicle and move around on foot. This becomes particularly useful when you want to switch to ground vehicles, including tanks and jeeps. Yes, that's right—*Warhawk* isn't just about flying anymore.

On top of all that, Incognito plans to include 32-player multiplayer support as well as a swappable, splitscreen multiplayer where other players can jump into a multiplayer session at any time on the same console. If that sounds crazy, it kind of is. And we have yet to totally grasp the implications of being able to do that—or if people would even use such a feature—but it's cool nonetheless.

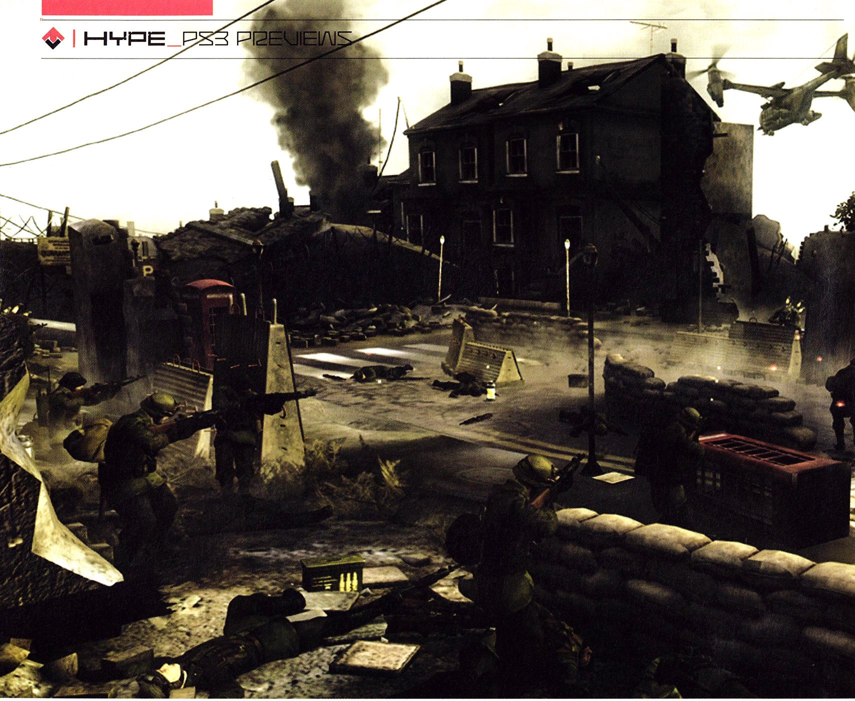
IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

Not really. *Warhawk* looks like it's moving along well, and the team's already included a lot of great features, not to mention full support for the controller. The only thing that we'd like to see is how the ground aspects of the game work—and if they feel bare bones compared to their aerial counterparts.



WARHAWK MEMORIES

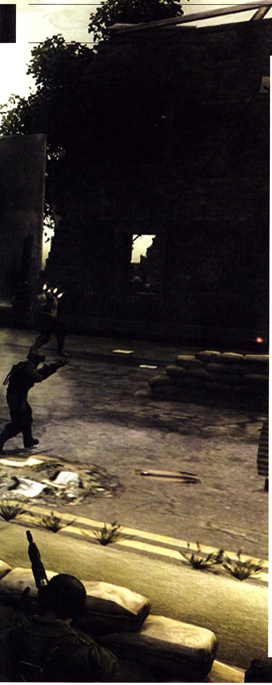
The original *Warhawk* was a fun little vehicle action shooter with lots of firefights and bizarre endings (we particularly like it when the villain chokes on a chicken bone). Plus, you can still play the original on your PS3!

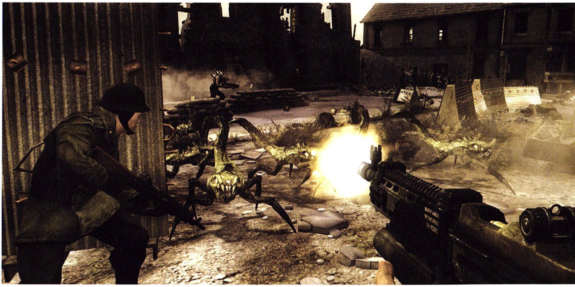


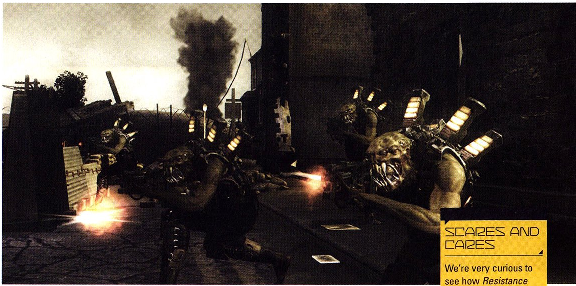
PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Insomniac RELEASE Launch

RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN

ONE LIFE TO LOSE FOR YOUR PLANET







SCARES AND CARES

We're very curious to see how *Resistance* balances dark, creepy corridor segments with its huge, open battlefield segments. If the game can keep the horror factor high and throw interesting ideas at us, we're excited.

WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

It's the 1950s, and Earth is in the grips of a massive invasion by the chimera, a race of aliens who use humans as building blocks to create seriously creepy creatures. When the invasion began shortly after World War I, the planet banded together to fight the aliens. As a result, in the world of *Resistance*, World War II never happened—which means that the game's realistic U.K. settings are modeled after the way cities in Britain looked *before* the bombings of WWII.

You play a grunt named Nathan Hale—a direct descendent of the American revolutionary of the same name, a relationship that the developers hint will play a role in the game. Your job seems, pretty much, to be extermination: Chimera check in, but they don't check out.

WHO'S MAKING IT?

Insomniac, a studio you probably know for its excellent and delightfully cute platform series *Spyro the Dragon* and *Ratchet & Clank*. So yeah, this is a bit of a departure for the company—though let's not forget that its first game, *Disruptor*, is a similarly unusual first-person shooter. Also, consider how shooting-heavy *Ratchet: Deadlocked* is.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

The team's experience with designing ridiculous weapons for the *Ratchet* series appears to be serving them well so far. One of the big draws of any FPS is its weapons, and from what we've seen, weapons are one of *Resistance*'s strongest suits. Take the "bull's-eye," for example. This snappy machine gun packs some interesting features under the hood. Its alternate fire mode sends out a tag: Hit an enemy with it, and any subsequent shot will home in on the tag, Jean-Baptiste Emanuel Zorg style.

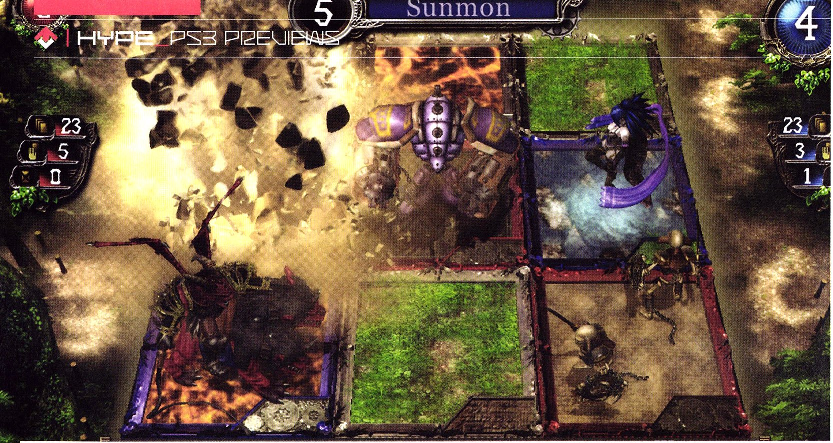
But wait, it gets better: Tag an inanimate object, and you can unleash a hail of bullets to swarm in tight formation around the tag. Sending out new tags moves the swarm around...and holding down the Tag button detonates the swarm, sending bullets flying off in a cosmic expansion of death. And this is just one weapon.

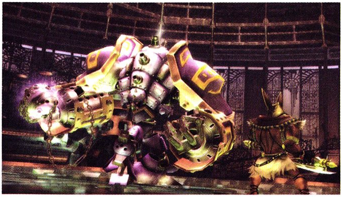
> INSOMNIAC'S EXPERIENCE IN DESIGNING RIDICULOUS WEAPONS HELPS....

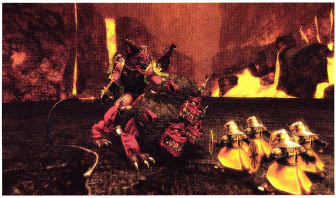
Other highlights include "building-sized creatures," in the words of Insomniac's Ted Price (when pressed for the *size* of the building, he declined to elaborate), player-driven vehicles, and an online mode that is *currently* running at 60 frames per second with 32 players—more will be supported if the final hardware can take it.

IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

The biggest risk is that *Resistance* could become just another run-of-the-mill shooter. Alien invasions are not exactly rare in the FPS world, and though the game is pretty and technologically impressive, we need to see more to determine whether this is more than a retro *Half-Life*.







ON THE MARKS

Before joining Sony CEA to head up R&D for special projects, Dr. Richard Marks got his Ph.D. at Stanford in the Aerospace Robotics Lab; his thesis project involved developing aquatic robots for the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute.

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Sony CEI RELEASE TBA

THE EYE OF JUDGMENT

LET THE WOOKIEES WIN

WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

Two players take turns laying down cards on a physical board composed of nine squares. In between turns, a camera angled above the game board reads the moves and displays fighting animations onscreen. The first person to occupy five of nine squares wins. Think of it kind of like a hologram-free version of that weird battle-chess knock-off from *Star Wars*.

WHO'S MAKING IT?

The game itself is being developed by Sony Japan, but the man behind the technology is Dr. Richard Marks, the same person who developed the EyeToy. While the camera prototype that's been shown publicly was *not* the EyeToy 2, it's a good bet that the version of the camera that ships with the game will be.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Though *The Eye of Judgment* may not have been able to compete with the sexy next-gen graphics shown by a lot of the action and shooter games that have been revealed so far, it's one of the few titles out there that's actually shown next-gen gameplay. Each card has its own little bar code on it, allowing the camera to read not only what the card is, but which direction it's been placed in—some sides of a card are weaker than others, so the orientation can affect the outcome of a battle. It was disappointing that no development studios ever really pushed the EyeToy beyond the realm of minigames, but this bodes well for the next generation of PS3 visual interactivity.

> ONE OF THE FEW TITLES OUT THERE THAT'S SHOWN NEXT-GEN GAMEPLAY.

IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

It's still way too early in the game's development to be concerned that the camera sometimes went a little wonky and had problems reading the cards. So the only thing that worries us right now is that the onscreen animations might slow down gameplay too much, making the cool concept grow old quickly.

PUB. LucasArts DEV. LucasArts RELEASE 2007

INDIANA JONES 2007

ITS WORKING TITLE SAYS...COMING NEXT YEAR

WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

Indiana Jones is back in a third-person action/adventure that has nothing to do with the long-awaited *Indy 4* film due out, er, sometime. The game is set in 1939, a year after *The Last Crusade*, and Dr. Jones, surely on a quest for something mythical and earth-shattering, finds himself in Depression-era San Francisco fighting hoodlums and thugs.

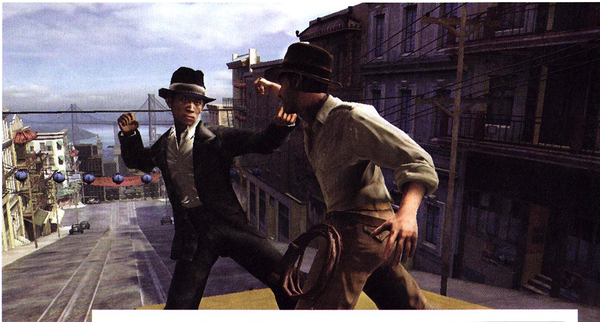
WHO'S MAKING IT?

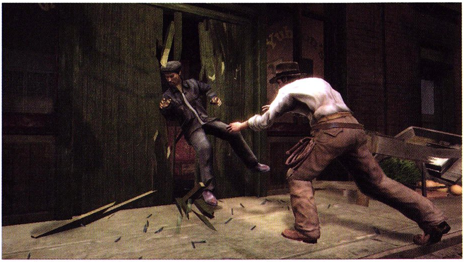
Not the Collective, who did 2003's *Emperor's Tomb*. This time, development honors fall to LucasArts' internal studio, with technical muscle coming from two key pieces of middleware: euphoria from NaturalMotion and Digital Molecular Matter technology from Pixelux.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Basically, euphoria is character AI that allows playable and nonplayable characters to act with real-world intelligence. The result: Characters react to their environments logically and never the same way twice; there are no prescripted moves. In one of his Chinatown fights, Indy punches a thug against a car. The thug's first reaction is to smash into the window, brace himself for the fall, and then get up. Indy hits him, but this time he punches back. Later, we see Indy fighting off even more baddies on top of one of San Francisco's famous cable cars. In a seemingly endless stream, the goons never appear from the same spot and vary from attacking or grabbing hold and pulling themselves back into the action.

> CHARACTERS ACT WITH REAL-WORLD INTELLIGENCE.

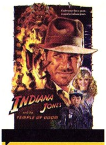




Digital Molecular Motion is to objects what euphoria is to characters. LucasArts showed Indy standing unmoving on a bridge. When the bridge is shaken a little, Indy moves a little. When the bridge is shaken violently, Indy flops around like a rag doll. Violent shakes resulted in violent flops. The point wasn't to torture him, but to show an environment with real-world physics, with objects acting as you would expect them to act.

IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

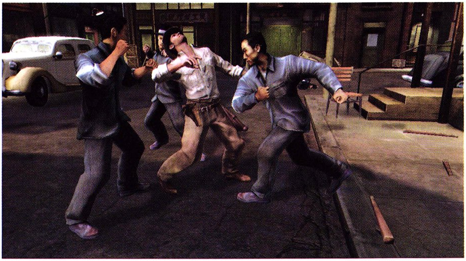
Sure. As good a game *Emperor's Tomb* is, it wasn't enough to break the previous 11 years of mediocre-to-bad Indy games (the last great one being *Fate of Atlantis* in 1992). LucasArts has some work to do to convince the world that Indy is truly the world's greatest hero. We're pretty sure story and gameplay will be more important to the next game's success than nifty physics technology.



INDIANA JONES
AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM

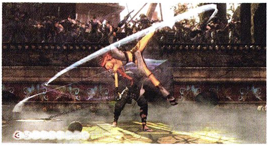
DR. JONES!

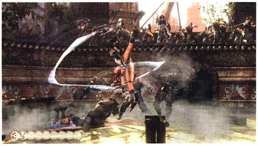
The one crap Indy movie (*Temple of Doom*) was the one *without* Nazis. And you'll notice that the best Indy stories—be they film or game—involve the illustrious Dr. Jones going up against Hitler's minions for some megapowerful artifact. To that end, even though Indy is in *OPM*'s home state in this game, we hope he'll run into more nefarious Nazis.



NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH...

Sword of Heaven, the '80s ninja film about a Japanese cop who goes to Los Angeles to investigate the disappearance of an ancient sword made from a meteor.





PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Ninja Theory RELEASE Winter

HEAVENLY SWORD

SLING BLADES

WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

Barbarians invade main heroine Nariko's country and proceed to wreak the requisite havoc across the land. To avenge the wrongs done to her people, Nariko arms herself with the titular Heavenly Sword, which, in addition to being badass, unfortunately saps away the life of any mortal who wields it. Nariko's challenge: to defeat all of the intruders before her life ends. Although, for the record, our money is on some intervening event that either A) lets her live, or B) turns her into an immortal.

WHO'S MAKING IT?

Development studio Ninja Theory was formerly known as Just Add Monsters, which made 2003's Xbox-exclusive title *Kung Fu Chaos*. The company explains the recent name change: "It's because we wanted a name with 'ninja' in it, and that's the best we could come up with!"

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Heavenly Sword was one of the prettiest-looking games to grace the PS3 at E3, and it's got a fancy Hollywood pedigree to go with its glamorous appearance. Andy Serkis (the voice actor and CG model for *LOTR*'s Gollum and *King Kong*'s Kong) provides the voice of the evil invader King Botan, and he helped out with the motion-capture sessions and contributed to the story line, character development, and casting sessions as well.

> HEAVENLY SWORD WAS ONE OF THE PRETTIEST GAMES TO GRACE THE PS3.

IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

Between the blade-equipped wrist chains, button pushing in cut-scenes à la *Shenmue*, and doomed-protagonist motif, what we saw seems very similar in many ways to *God of War* (a popular nickname during its E3 premiere was "*Goddess of War*"). Hopefully, as more of the game is shown, we'll see something that gives it its own personality.

PUB. EA Games DEV. EA Montreal RELEASE 2007

ARMY OF TWO

BROTHERS IN ARMS, INDEED

WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

In the near future, the U.S. military has become spread so thin that America must enlist the help of private military organizations for its most dangerous efforts. You and your, uh, *partner* must travel the world assisting in operations that require stealth and speed.

WHO'S MAKING IT?

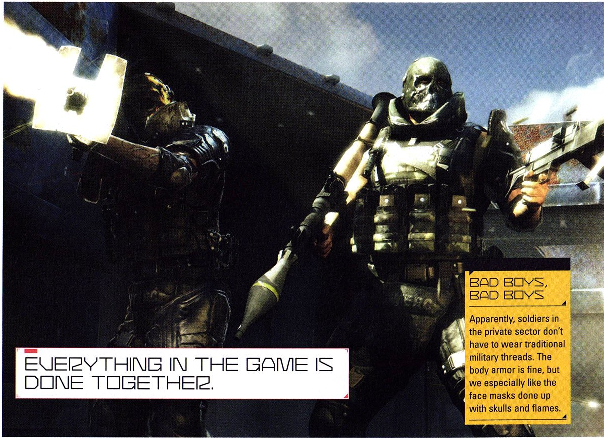
EA's new Montreal studio, which includes many former members of Ubisoft's *Splinter Cell* team.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

*Every*thing in the game is done together. The interaction between the two main characters is absolutely central to the game, and we're seeing some innovative uses of the dual-lead mechanic, like one guy controlling a tandem parachute jump while the other snipes at enemies on the ground.

IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

It's really hard to avoid the childish innuendo that arises from such unusual gameplay elements as participating in a near-death experience by helping your partner literally run away from "the light." No, we're not kidding. It's pretty distracting, actually. Plus, no game has yet managed to pull off cooperative AI convincingly, so without a human-controlled partner, the game could well and truly stink.



EVERYTHING IN THE GAME IS DONE TOGETHER.

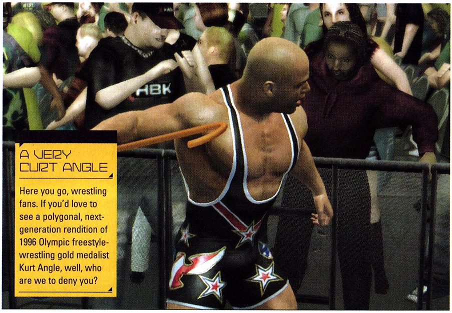
BAD BOYS, BAD BOYS

Apparently, soldiers in the private sector don't have to wear traditional military threads. The body armor is fine, but we especially like the face masks done up with skulls and flames.

PUB. THQ DEV. Yuke's RELEASE 2007

WWE SMACKDOWN! VS. RAW 2007

NOTHING FAKE ABOUT THE NEW GRAPHICS SYSTEM



A VERY CURT ANGLE

Here you go, wrestling fans. If you'd love to see a polygonal, next-generation rendition of 1996 Olympic freestyle-wrestling gold medalist Kurt Angle, well, who are we to deny you?

WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

It's obviously the biggest, but it also may very well be the best game in the blockbuster *SmackDown! vs. RAW* wrestling series.

WHO'S MAKING IT?

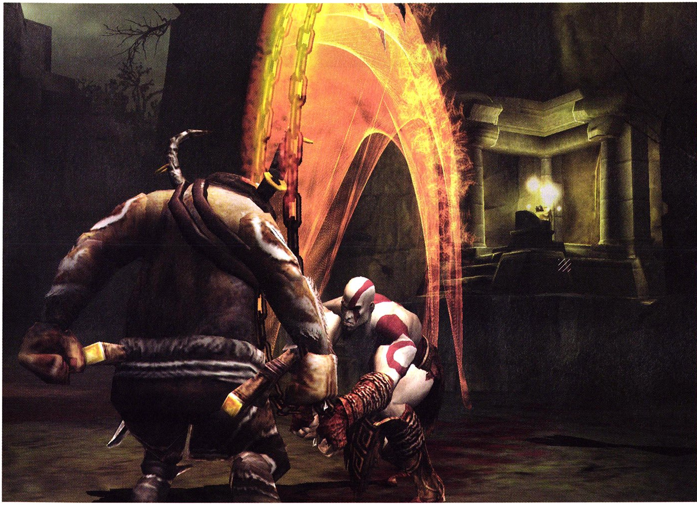
Yuke's, the creative geniuses behind all the *SmackDown!* games.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

We've all had our fill of the *SVR07*'s touted "sweat system," which causes the wrestlers to sweat more the longer and harder they fight. What we hope to hear and see more of is the new grappling system, which is now interactive and smart. With deft use of the right analog stick and combos executed via the shoulder buttons, almost any move can be controlled directly, including suplexes, airplane spins, and military presses. Plus, wrestlers now have more freedom to fight wherever they want in and out of the ring, including in the crowd. Spectators can even hand you objects like chairs and canes to use against opponents.

IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

Only the features we don't yet know anything about, like the full roster and exactly how opponent AI plays out.



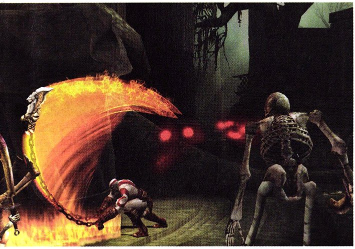
SECOND VERSE, SAME AS...

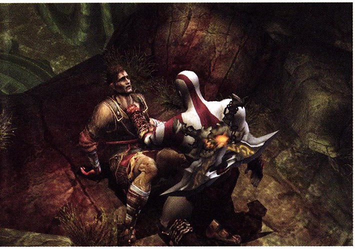
The primary voice actors from *GOW* will be returning in the sequel, including T.C. Carson as Kratos and Linda Hunt as the narrator. Barlog describes the additions to the cast of voices as "exciting new ones," but, of course, that's all he could tell us for now.

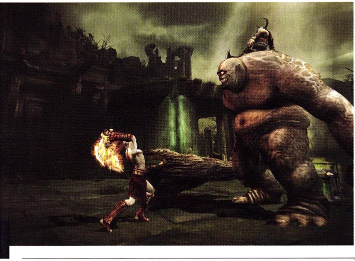
PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Sony Santa Monica RELEASE February 2007

GOD OF WAR II

OUR IMMORTAL BELOVED







WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

After defeating Ares and being christened the new God of War at the end of the first game, Kratos now has to deal with all the petty jealousy that goes on among the other gods. At some point in all of the jealousy and fighting, Kratos is killed and must try and find his way back to the land of the living. This journey includes a visit to the island of the Fates, who are greater than everyone else because they oversee the futures of everyone.

WHO'S MAKING IT?

The sequel is still being developed by Sony Santa Monica, but David Jaffe is assuming the role of producer rather than director this time around. The new man behind the wheel is Cory Barlog, who was the art director for the first *God of War*.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Um, the big deal is only that this is a sequel to one of the best games released for the PS2, that's all. And since the team is working on the same system that they did previously, they can concentrate on the game's content rather than having to spend a lot of time on basic hardware functionality. While Barlog promises that the core gameplay will essentially be the same, *GOW2* will have some additions. For one, Kratos will acquire a whole new set of weapons that he takes from the broken bodies of his vanquished enemies (the section that we saw showcased a bow that shoots harsh gusts of wind). He'll also be able to switch seamlessly between weapons and magic.

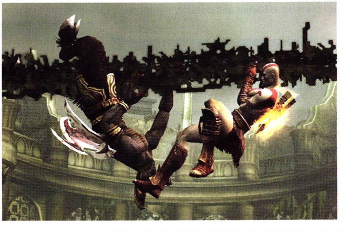
It won't be just about fighting, however, and *Tomb Raider's* Lara Croft isn't the only one to borrow from her peers—Kratos' blades will now allow him to grapple off hooks located at strategic points. And in addition to the blue mana orbs, green health orbs, and red experience orbs of the first game, Barlog says there will be a fourth type of orb, although he couldn't yet talk about it or about what it does.

Every sequel mandates new enemies, and *GOW2* is no exception (we saw skeletons, trolls working in tandem with Minotaurs, and a crazy lava-rock monster). Kratos will also interact with well-known characters from mythology. In one example, Jason (of the Argonauts) is getting worked over by some enemies. By the time Kratos comes to his rescue, it's too late, but he whispers a hint about getting to the Golden Fleece, which we presume will be significant later.

IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

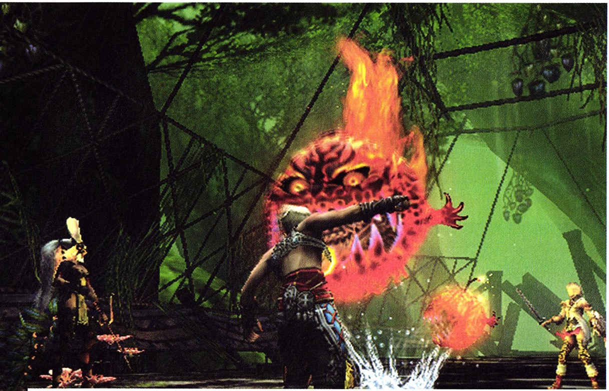
The good thing about not changing things too much in the sequel is that no one gets mad. The bad thing is that, well, it's really just more of what you've already seen. And don't get us wrong—more *God of War* is A-OK with us. But by the very virtue of it being a sequel, it can't have the same smack-you-in-the-face freshness that the first one did.

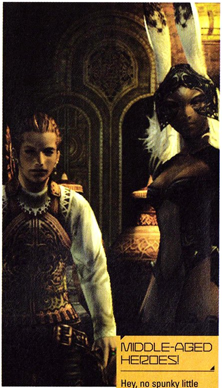
> THIS IS A SEQUEL TO ONE OF THE BEST GAMES RELEASED FOR THE PS2....



ERASE BLOG POST?

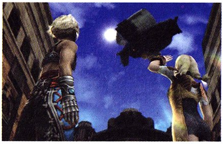
We read an entry on Barlog's blog at corybarlog.modblog.com, but at press time, his blog is gone. However, David Jaffe had a blog on Modblog that he moved over to Typepad due to technical issues, so maybe Barlog's "disappearing blog" is temporary, too.





MIDDLE-AGED HEROES!

Hey, no spunky little lads saving the universe! Okay, Vaan is an older teen living in the mean streets, but there are 20- and even 30-year-olds in the game. In Japan, the most popular character is sky pirate Balthier, who is 22. Next game, we might hit 40!



PUB. Square Enix DEV. Square Enix RELEASE October

FINAL FANTASY XII

THE BIGGEST AND BEST FF YET?

WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

Yeah, we know you've heard this with the release of each new *FF*, but this one just might be the best one yet. Each title has been a pretty good evolution in gameplay along with a new story, but *FFXII* makes some big changes to the gameplay while peppering the story with references to past *FFs* (Chaos is in *XII*! And a Demon Wall straight from *FFIV*!). In short, this is both the most different and possibly the most definitive *Final Fantasy*.

WHO'S MAKING IT?

OK, at first this game was being done by the team from *Final Fantasy Tactics* (GBA and PS1), with Yasumi Matsuno as director. Then Matsuno had health issues that forced him to leave the project, and Hiroyuki Ito (designer of the job system in *FFV* and director of *FFIX*) and Hiroshi Minagawa (art director for most of Matsuno's games) became codirectors. It was a bit worrisome when Akitoshi Kawazu (the main man behind *Unlimited SaGa*) became the executive producer. But so far it looks like Kawazu knows to leave well enough alone, as *FFXII* still feels like *FF* and not like a *SaGa* game.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Combat has gone through a huge change in that it's a single-player *FF* that has combat resembling both *FFXI* and a PC strategy game. That is to say, the monsters are out in the open, and you walk up to them and initiate combat à la *FFXI* (except in real time). But then there are gambits, which are rules and settings that you design for your party members that govern how they behave on their own. With the proper gambits set up, you can initiate combat and have your party fight baddies on its own—the strategy comes from having the right gambits set up in the first place. The battle system is flexible to let you either manage every move yourself or make fighting completely hands-off.

> OK, THIS ONE JUST MIGHT BE THE BEST ONE YET, SERIOUSLY....

We haven't even touched on how gorgeous *FFXII* looks or how it features our favorite villains yet: the judges. Just how badass are they? Imagine if five Darth Vaders (from the original trilogy, no emo prequel Vader) were the main baddies.

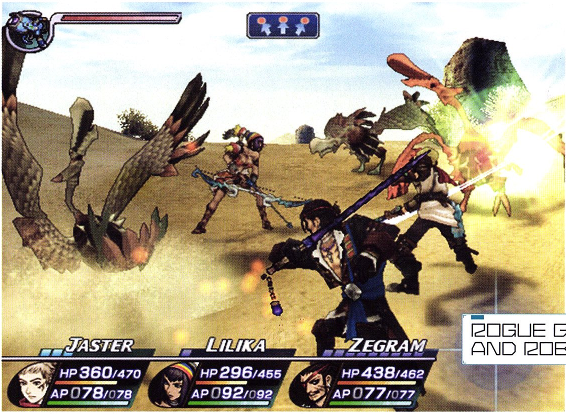
IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

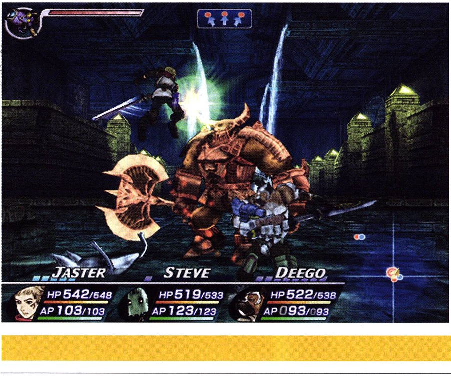
Just the wait for it to hit American shores, and the response from *FF* fans who might think that *FFXII* is too weird and different.

PUB. Sony CEA **DEV.** Level-5 **RELEASE** October

ROGUE GALAXY

AN ACTION RPG THAT'S POSITIVELY GALACTIC





PlayStation.2
Dark Cloud 2

ACTION JACKSONS

Level-5 has a fair bit of experience in mixing action and roleplaying, as evidenced by their two *Dark Cloud* titles. So far, there has been one announced tweak to *Rogue Galaxy's* combat for the U.S.: you can now trigger chain attacks yourself.

WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

After we first saw *Rogue Galaxy* at last September's Tokyo Game Show, it took a while before we stopped inadvertently calling it *Rogue Squadron*. It wasn't just the name that threw us off: The game's plot has you playing as Jaster Rogue, a small-planet kid from the outer reaches of the galaxy who gets dragged into an operatic adventure by a space pirate (named Dorgengoa). With your small party, you travel from world to world (like a jungle planet called Juraiko—hooray for weird names in RPGs!), fighting enemies and righting wrongs in the universe. Add in the fact that Factor 5 created *Rogue Squadron* and *Rogue Galaxy* is being developed by...

WHO'S MAKING IT?

Level-5. And you see we came by our confusion honestly. But, nearly a year later, it's crystal clear that *Rogue Galaxy* is a vast and robust action RPG from the makers of the superb *Dark Cloud, Dark Cloud 2,* and *Dragon Quest VIII* (the last of which Scooter awarded a 4.5/5 score and Game of the Month in our January issue).

> ROGUE GALAXY IS A VAST AND ROBUST ACTION-RPG....

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

If the developer's pedigree isn't enough to impress, the colorful, cel-shaded 3D graphics and free-form combat system ought to raise an eyebrow. The U.S. version ought to raise the other eyebrow: It'll feature expanded worlds, a tweaked version of said combat system (for you import fiends), loads of items to discover, and other new content, including an entirely new chapter.

IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

Only that *Rogue Galaxy* could get lost in the shuffle, with *Final Fantasy XII* also shipping in October and the PS3 hype machine running full blast.

PUB. Capcom DEV. Clover Studios RELEASE Winter

GOD HAND

TAKING BEAT-EM-UPS TO THE MOON AND BACK

WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

Do you remember the Japanese anime *Fist of the North Star*? Probably not, but if *God Hand* could be compared to anything, it's that. Both share incredibly ridiculous, over-the-top melee combat and a general art style. If that's not clear enough for you, then just imagine kicking someone so hard that he or she flies into the stratosphere. Yeah, it's crazy like that.

WHO'S MAKING IT?

Now here's the real kicker—this game has some serious talent behind it. Both Shinji Mikami, creator of *Resident Evil*, and Atsushi Inaba, the man behind *Okami* and *Viewtiful Joe*, are working on the game through Inaba's Clover Studio. It's kind of weird that these two people in particular are working together since they seem to have such different design philosophies—not to mention that the game itself is a rather odd choice—but the initial glimpses of the project are promising, and we have to admit that we're curious to see how the final product turns out.

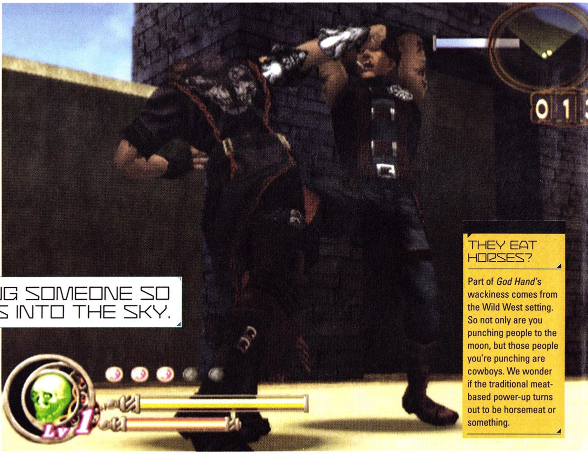
> JUST IMAGINE KICKING SOMEONE SO HARD THAT HE FLIES INTO THE SKY.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

The beat-em-up genre has been pretty stagnant since the days of *Final Fight* and *Streets of Rage*, but *God Hand* seems to have the potential to reinvigorate it. Its style complements the very easy to use, but still cool, fighting mechanics. On top of that, it's a PS2 game, and it may very well be one of the last cool games we see for the aging platform before the PS3 era begins.

IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

The only major thing we're worried about is its novelty. Yes, it's cool to see someone get punched several times and then kicked into space, but that'll get old after a while. We can only hope that fighting mechanics and other features hold up throughout the rest of the game, or it might be stuck in the beat-em-up abyss along with other recent beat-em-ups.

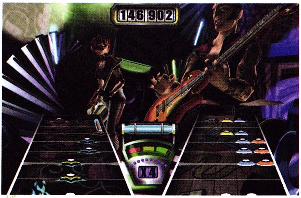


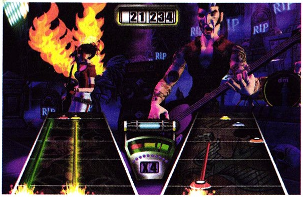
THEY EAT HORSES?

Part of *God Hand*'s wackiness comes from the Wild West setting. So not only are you punching people to the moon, but those people you're punching are cowboys. We wonder if the traditional meat-based power-up turns out to be horsemeat or something.

DOWNLOAD MANIA?

We cornered a semi-drunk RedOctane employee and asked whether or not Tool, with its weird bass lines, will be in *GHII*. He replied that Tool is too h-core to be in *GHII*, but in future titles that allow for downloads, that could change. Hmm.





PUB. Activision **DEV.** RedOctane/Harmonix **RELEASE** 2006

GUITAR HERO II

FOUR-STRING HEAVEN

WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

If you don't know what the deal is with *Guitar Hero*, you need to get your ass out to the store right now—*NOW!*—and pick up a copy. It's easily one of the most entertaining and accessible games out there and has hands-down the best song list of any music game to date. And this is the sequel.

WHO'S MAKING IT?

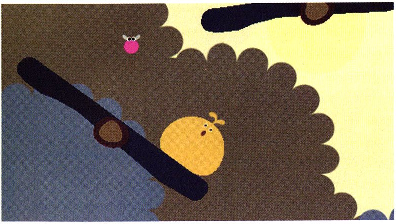
Music-game heroes Harmonix, of *Frequency* and *Karaoke Revolution* fame, with the help of the recently purchased RedOctane.

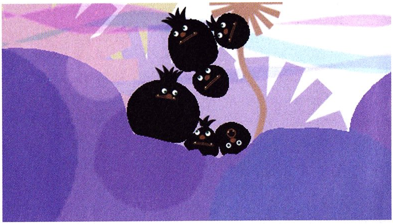
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

A huge song list—55 and counting—is just the tip of the iceberg. To keep the game on topic, you can expect tunes like Kiss' "Strutter" (described by producer John Tam as "the most fun to play *Guitar Hero* song *ever*"), Black Sabbath's "War Pigs," Rush's "YYZ," and Primus' "John the Fisherman." If you're familiar with either of the last two tunes, you'll be anticipating the other big news: *GHII* now features bass. That's right, in the totally revamped co-op multiplayer mode, the second player can play either bass or rhythm guitar. In co-op, players must charge up a communal rock meter by pulling off combos *together*—and then they must engage the Star Power bonus by tilting their guitars toward the sky *simultaneously*. It's like a choreographed stage move!

IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

Not a single damn thing. Unless the people choosing the song list are all laid off in the Activision buyout, RedOctane almost assuredly has another hit on its hands.

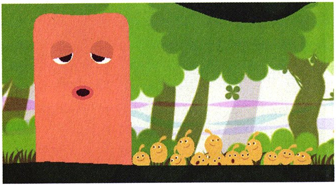




PUB. Sony CEA **DEV.** Sony CEI **RELEASE** September

LOCOROCO

WE ARE THE WORLD



WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

You are playing as a planet, and your inhabitants (the LocoRoco) are being attacked by the evil Moja. You must use your ability to rock and roll (as in tilt your planetary surface back and forth) in order to save the LocoRoco.

WHO'S MAKING IT?

Sony Computer Entertainment International, over in Japan, is developing the game internally.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

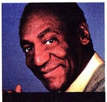
Well, let's see: The concept is original, the controls are simple and intuitive, and gameplay is fun. In short, it's exactly the type of game that we pictured coming to the PSP. So a big pat on the back to you, Sony dudes who made this!

One of our favorite things about the game is the little LocoRoco themselves. They have a gel-like consistency, which makes them very fun to bounce around the world. As you roll the LocoRoco, you collect what appear to be pods that house them; each new pod adds a new LocoRoco. The creatures can travel all together as one big ball, or you can press a button and split them into separate entities to get them through tighter spaces. While the controls are simple, it will take time and practice to get good at playing; having an eye for angles will help, kind of like it does in billiards. Best of all is the game's fun music, which features the LocoRoco singing along—they even split into multiple voices when you break them apart into individuals and, apparently, each of the six LocoRoco types has its own distinct voice. Between the music and the clean, bright art style, Sony might as well make the game's subtitle "The PSP's *Katamari*."

> SONY MIGHT AS WELL CALL LOCOROCO "THE PSP'S KATAMARI."

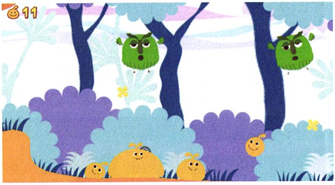
IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

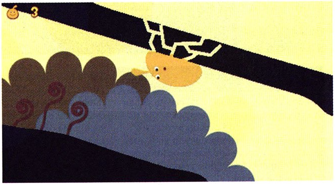
Other than the worry that the PSP isn't durable enough to withstand such vigorous shoulder button usage, our biggest concern is that the game can sell enough copies to encourage developers to continue making new, innovative titles. This is one game we can't wait to play.

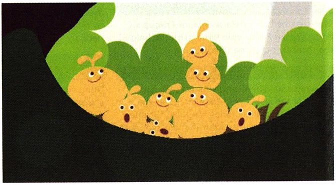


SPOKESMAN SUGGESTION

Given the LocoRoco's rather Jello-like consistency (that of the jiggler variety, not the plain variety), we think it would be very appropriate to hire Bill Cosby as the game's celebrity spokesperson.







PUB. Konami DEV. Kojima Productions RELEASE Winter

METAL GEAR SOLID: PORTABLE OPS

POCKET GEAR!

TAKE A NORMAL MGS TITLE AND PUT IT ON THE PSP.

WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

Take *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence*'s online game and cram it into the PSP. Well, that's the part that we played, but the overall idea is to take a traditional *Metal Gear* title and release it for the PSP (as opposed to the *Metal Gear Acid* spin-offs). Also, the game can be considered a "sequel" to *MGS3*, as it takes place six years later and focuses on Big Boss creating FOXHOUND.

WHO'S MAKING IT?

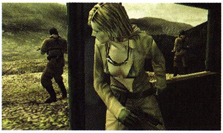
Those fine folks at Kojima Productions. Noriaki Okamura was previously the producer of both *Metal Gear Acid* titles, and he's now sitting in the producer's chair for *Portable Ops*. As always, KP bigwig Hideo Kojima oversees everything and, in fact, he admits that *Portable Ops* was first conceived as a "competitive fighting game for the PSP" before becoming a *MGS* title.

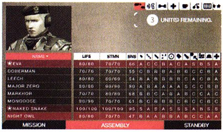
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

It's *Metal Gear Solid* for the PSP! That's what PSP gamers have been asking for! For *MGS* fanboys, the story sounds pretty groovy, as you play badass Big Boss and travel the world looking for soldiers to recruit in order to create FOXHOUND. The multiplayer mode we played was straightforward deathmatch and feels like Metal Gear Online (from *MGS3: Subsistence*) with a few tweaks. Besides the obvious changes to the controls (which actually weren't too bad—the nub moves you, the D-pad moves the camera, and the L trigger locks on to people), *Portable Ops* also features sound-based radar—noisier people show up on the radar more prominently. If you're noisy, you show up as a red circle with a bunch of squiggly lines, but if you stay quiet, you just show up as a red circle. The idea of unlocking characters by going to various Wi-Fi access points and taking on different players in multiplayer sounds really neat as well.

IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

The big mystery is single-player mode, as Kojima Productions has only shown cut-scenes and multiplayer. So, how the game plays when you're by yourself is a big "huh?" Plus, we don't know how this whole "Wi-Fi hot spot equals new character" thing will actually work.





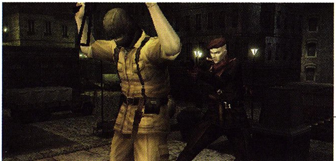
3 UNIT(S) REMAINING.

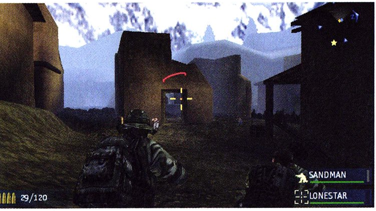
NAME	LIFE	STMN	SNS											
★EVA	80/80	70/70	66	A	C	C	B	A	C	A	S	B	S	A
DOBERMAN	70/70	70/70	55	C	B	B	B	A	B	B	C	C	B	A
LEECH	80/80	60/60	54	B	A	B	B	B	B	C	A	C	B	A
MAJOR ZERO	80/80	90/90	80	A	B	A	A	A	A	S	C	C	B	B
MARKHOR	70/70	80/80	68	B	B	C	A	B	A	B	C	C	A	C
MONGOOSE	90/90	70/70	61	B	C	B	B	B	C	B	C	C	B	C
★NAKED SNAKE	100/100	100/100	95	S	A	S	A	S	S	S	A	B	S	S
NIGHT OWL	80/80	70/70	47	B	A	A	B	B	A	B	C	C	A	A

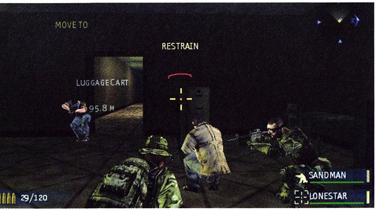
MISSION ASSEMBLY STANDBY

SEVEN SAMURAI GEAR?

Kojima's original concept for *Portable Ops* was to have players travel around and recruit other. He cites the film *Seven Samurai* as the basic inspiration for the warrior-gathering mechanic.







PUB. Sony CEA **DEV.** Zipper **RELEASE** Fall

SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS FIRETEAM BRAVO 2

BRINGING THE SOCOM BACK

WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

Fireteam Bravo was perhaps a bit too arcadey for the *SOCOM* faithful. *FTB2* cranks up the difficulty, the complexity, and the realism.

WHO'S MAKING IT?

Zipper. *SOCOM* is what that company does.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

The biggest change is a revamp of the lock-on targeting system. It's now based on the weight of your equipped weapon; the heavier (i.e., more powerful) the weapon, the slower the lock-on. Furthermore, the game also introduces the concepts of "command equity" and "local influence," which determine the availability of intel and equipment. And we also weaseled this bit of exclusive news out of the team: *All* multiplayer modes in *FTB2* will support the excellent "captive" style of play from the original. Huzzah!

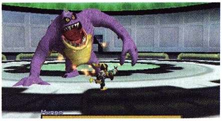
IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

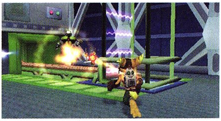
Some of us found the faster pace of the first *Fireteam Bravo* refreshing; it'll be interesting to see if the more complex sequel works as well on the handheld.

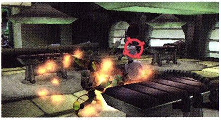
VI
SEAL TEAM SIX

NAVY SIX SHOOTERS

The Navy SEALs counterterrorism unit is the U.S. Navy Special Warfare Development Group, or DEVGRU. Rumor is that DEVGRU is merely SEAL Team Six renamed. They're still badasses.







PUB. Sony CEA **DEV.** High Impact **RELEASE** September

RATCHET & CLANK: SIZE MATTERS

HONEST, THEY JUST GOT OUT OF THE POOL

WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

It's the extraordinarily entertaining platforming series shrunk down to make it easy to carry around with you.

WHO'S MAKING IT?

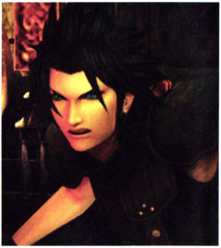
Newly formed studio High Impact, which is made up primarily of former *Ratchet* team members that were brought over from Insomniac. *Daxter* on PSP was brought about similarly when Naughty Dog employees branched off to form Ready at Dawn.

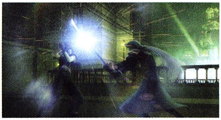
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Daxter proved that 3D platformers could totally work on PSP (missing right analog stick and all), and our hands-on time at E3 gives every indication that *Size Matters* will continue the trend. It really does *feel* like a *Ratchet* game, which is good news indeed.

IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

Well, one of the main draws of the *Ratchet* series is its depth: the vast array of easily accessible upgrades that keep even the most mildly obsessive player going. It's possible some of this bonus content may need to be stripped out of a handheld version.





PUB. Square Enix **DEV.** Square Enix **RELEASE** September

CRISIS CORE: FINAL FANTASY VII

NOW YOU CAN TAKE CLOUD WITH YOU!

WHAT'S THE BASIC CONCEPT?

Remember how in *FFVII*, Cloud basically found out that he idolized his buddy Zack so much that he started believing that parts of Zack's life were his own? Well, now Zack has his own game for the PSP, so we can finally learn how much of a cool dude he was in person. Well, virtually in person.

WHO'S MAKING IT?

Well, while the director, Hajim Tabata, is a bit of an unknown, he's being supervised by producer Yoshinori Kitase. Kitase knows *FFVII*, as he was the director for the original game way back in the day.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

The big deal is that Squenix is finally talking about it! Although at the moment, the company is only focusing on story, which sounds cool (the whole Zack plotline was one of the bigger mysteries in *FFVII*), and it looks nice, but...

IS THERE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT?

Squenix still won't talk about the what gameplay itself will be like, except to say that it will have some action.

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MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
ADULTS ONLY 18+ AO CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

VIDEO GAME
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ON BACK

EVERYONE 10+
E 10+
Cartoon Violence
Mild Lyrics
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

ESRB
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REVIEWS

MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE, ONE GAME AT A TIME

74

FFXI: TREASURES OF AHT URHGAN

EXTENDED LIFE

PS2

OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE GAME OF THE MONTH

80

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

LARA IN YOUR POCKET

PSP

OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE GAME OF THE MONTH

RATING KEY

No more blargs, octagons, or whatever you've called them—now we're sticking with straight-up numbers. And any game that receives five of 'em is something truly special that deserves a spot in your collection. On the other hand, a 2.5 is merely mediocre. And a 0.5? Well...at least they're fun to rip apart.

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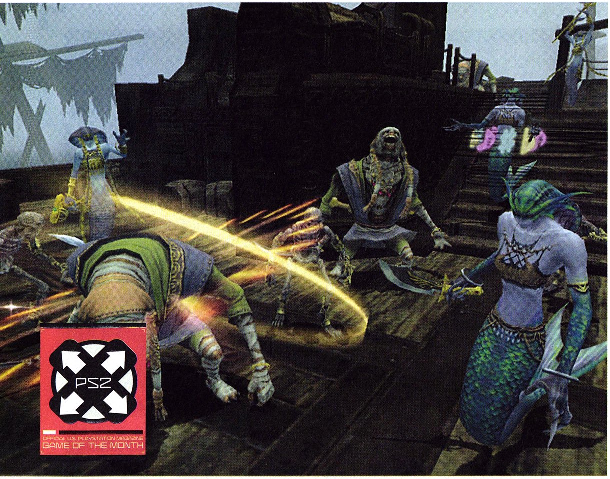
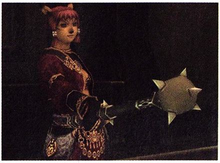
PlayStation
MAGAZINE
ISSUE 106

ON THE DVD

URBAN CHAOS: RIOT RESPONSE

Read the review, then check out the game plus other classic shooters!





PUB. Square Enix **DEV.** Square Enix **ESRB** T **MSRP** $29.99

FINAL FANTASY XI: TREASURES OF AHT URHGAN

EXPAND YOUR HORIZONS

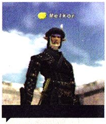
After a couple of years of cold-and-dreary melancholy supplied by the overly difficult and payoff-lacking *Chains of Promathia* expansion, Square Enix returns with a new chapter in the *FFXI* saga, one packed with sunshine, rainbows, and—most importantly—fun. While *Treasures of Aht Urhgan* certainly comes packed with challenges aplenty, the basic considerations that you had to work so hard for in *COP* come pro bono in *TOAU*, which is a great sign that the development team was actually listening to user feedback. New features like chocobo breeding and racing, and three new jobs (blue mage, corsair, and puppetmaster) add exciting new dynamics that have rejuvenated this exceptionally deep MMO. New crafting recipes have introduced a slew of new armor and equipment, while the faster respawn rates on the brand-new monsters mean faster leveling and less grinding on the path to level 75. These trends have created fertile new environments filled with eager players, but they've also made a wasteland of the older *COP* areas. Still, expect Square Enix to fine-tune things—as it always does—via patches, which can only spell good news for veterans of this highly polished MMO. Too bad Sony yanked hard drive support with the redesigned PS2.

The new Assault missions offer a vast array of awards (including armor, weapons, and accessories) for players more interested in PVE (players versus environment) and less interested in PVP (player versus player), and they're a great way to engage in some quick thrills without having to organize a full party or alliance. Less successful is the Besieged feature, which subjects the Al Zahbi zone to *Lord of the Rings*–style raids, pitting the players against the enemy forces that occasionally invade the city. Watching the aging PS2 trying to load the 400-plus people who crowd the zone when a Besieged alarm goes off—in addition to loading the dozens of monsters themselves—indicates that this new feature is too much for the system to handle. The end result is that most fights are over before people even realize they've begun, with monsters barely appearing or players barely acting before everything is killed, which pretty much negates one of the big additions in *TOAU*. Hopefully, the developers will tweak Besieged so that it functions as planned, because at the moment, it's quite broken.

Still, that's just one part of all the new stuff added to the game. The visuals take a turn for the better, with sharper, brighter environments that are painted in the colors of autumn, while cool new monster types (mamool ja, trolls, and lamiae, among many others) offer leveling parties new enemies to defeat, addressing one of the old criticisms from previous expansions: All enemies look the same. And as history has proven, Square Enix typically adds more content through patch updates than is in the initial expansions themselves. Given the overall level of quality and activity in *TOAU*, it looks like Square Enix's first MMO has plenty of life left in it after all. | *James Mielke*

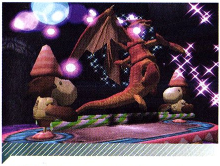
VERDICT Not everything is working right yet, but this expansion gives *FFXI* a new lease on life nevertheless.

SCORE 4.5 | 5



MARKET SHARE

One of the positive side effects of the new expansion is that the addition of various types of armor (such as the headpiece Walahra Turban, which is for level 75 and has stats of HP +30, MP +30, Haste +5%) has led some similar items to drop drastically in price. Sorry Panther +1 players!



MONSTER RANCHER EVO

A LOGICAL EVOLUTION

PUB. Tecmo DEV. Tecmo
ESRB E10+ MSRP $39.99

The ***Monster Rancher*** series has always been a guilty pleasure for some. While its RPG elements haven't necessarily been the main attraction, the monster-creating and -raising features have been enough to keep the series going for the past few years. Tecmo's latest release, *Monster Rancher EVO,* attempts to build off of what made the previous games popular in the circle of *Monster Rancher* fans, and to build up more of the RPG elements to make the experience feel all the more cohesive.

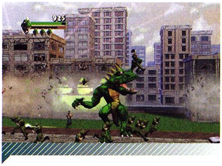
The only problem is that *EVO* tries to do too much at once in the early going with the creation and raising aspects of the game. When you're first starting, *EVO* bombards you with information on how to properly train and gives you an overview of all the minigames in which you have to participate if you want to build a strong and healthy monster. It's totally overwhelming at first—the circus atmosphere doesn't help any—and if you're not willing to stick with it, you won't get to experience the adventure parts of the game.

These adventure segments of *EVO* aren't terrible, but they're pretty simple. Most of them are just there for the purpose of seeing what your monster can actually do, and they serve as a decent break from all the odd circus business. Unfortunately, they also seem pretty shallow, as the dungeons just don't offer all that much outside of the "battle, treasure, battle, treasure" structure.

If the adventure aspects had been developed a little bit more, *Monster Rancher EVO* would've easily succeeded in attempting to build a stronger RPG element, but as it stands, the game just falls short of offering a complete RPG experience. However, fans of the series may want to check it out briefly just to see if the game still tickles their fancies. I *Giancarlo Varanini*

PROS The training and monster development aspects still make up the best parts of the game
CONS The emphasis on the RPG side of *EVO* falls a bit short, but it gives us hope for future games in the series.

SCORE 2.5 | 5



NARUTO: ULTIMATE NINJA

NINJAS JUST WANNA HAVE FUN

PUB. Namco Bandai DEV. CyberConnect2
ESRB T MSRP $29.99

More often than not, titles like *Naruto: Ultimate Ninja* are just lame attempts to cash in on insanely popular anime franchises; rarely do these games have anything that would make them stand out if they didn't have their fancy licenses. Shockingly, *Naruto: Ultimate Ninja* doesn't fall into this category, because the game is actually fun—in fact, it's probably one of the more entertaining casual fighting games on the PS2.

A better way to think of the game might be to imagine Nintendo's *Super Smash Bros.* with the cast of *Naruto.* The characters—while the same in a general context—all have unique sets of combinations and super-special moves. Beginners can get away with mashing on the punch buttons, while more expert players can use an assortment of basic combinations tied in with giant leaps, teleportation, shuriken, and whole bunch of other ninja goodies.

Plus, the environments and the "match observers" play a big role as well. Not only can you leap from walls, telephone poles, and other objects littered in the background, but you can also interact with some of the characters standing around. Most of the time, they'll hand you valuable items that you can use in battle, such as special shuriken or even health. Occasionally, some can even be called to aid you in battle, so fights don't always boil down to who can attack faster—the items add a fair bit of strategy.

On top of all that, *Naruto* just looks great. The cel-shaded sketch look of the characters falls in line perfectly with the theme of the game. The backgrounds are also richly detailed; while the bystanders are merely 2D cutouts, there's a certain cheesy charm about it that won't really bother you at all. Really, if *Naruto*'s your thing, then this game is right up your alley—but even the most hardcore fighting-game fanatics will get a kick out of it as well. I *Giancarlo Varanini*

PROS Looks great and features well-balanced mechanics
CONS Easy for skilled fighters, fewer auto-connect combos would've been better

4 | 5

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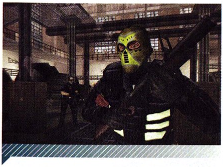


X-MEN: THE OFFICIAL GAME

X-TREMELY EASY

| PUB. Activision DEV. Z-Axis Games/Hypnos

ESRB T MSRP $39.99

It's too easy to deride a game that's too easy. Outside of kids' games, an easy game usually means a rushed game. And so it'd be easy to dismiss *X-Men: The Official Game*—but this is easily the best "easy" game you'll have played since last year (when the best easy game was probably *Fantastic Four*). Timing to release alongside *X-Men: The Last Stand*'s May 26 movie premiere, Activision provides three excellent clues that it rushed the *X-Men* game to hit with the film.

Clue No. 1: The game isn't based on the movie, and there aren't any animated cut-scenes. Activision copped to the "not the game of the film" early, as the movie script simply wasn't ready. The excellent story, cowritten by *X-Men* screenwriter Zak Penn and comic-book legend Chris Claremont, is actually a prequel to *X-Men: The Last Stand* and explains why Nightcrawler didn't make it to the big screen this time. The cut-scenes appear as a series of illustrated stills.

Clue No. 2: You play one of three characters: Wolverine, Nightcrawler, or Iceman. Single-player only. Yes, there are many more than three X-Men. And yes, multiplayer co-op would've been off the hook. The good news is that even though their movements and actions are limited, the trio can still be downright cool at times.

Clue No. 3: At the start of each mission, the game asks you to set the difficulty level. I like this: It's saying, "Look, play this on Easy. C'mon—we actually want you to see the entire game." But even on the Superhero (hard) setting, the enemies aren't too difficult. And speaking of enemies, there's also a distinct lack of boss battles.

Those are all the clues. Now back to the answer: *X-Men: The Official Game* most certainly does feel like a rush job, but honestly, in good way. With the exception of a few factual glitches (it's Shadowcat that can walk through walls, not Nightcrawler), the game's pretty solid and fun overall. | *Tom Byron*

X MARKS THE SPOT The game's ease works in its favor

X IT OUT Simple control set, only three playable characters, nonanimated cut-scenes

SCORE 3 | 5

URBAN CHAOS: RIOT RESPONSE

THE TERRORISTS HAVE ALREADY WON

| PUB. Eidos DEV. Rocksteady Studios

ESRB M MSRP $39.99

I have to admit that I wasn't expecting much from *Urban Chaos*. The game seems like it's been around for years, spending an inordinate amount of time in development hell before finally coming out. Usually when something like that happens, the game simply can't live up to any sort of expectations. And for the most part, *Urban Chaos* doesn't.

But it does end up being a decent game—again, for the most part. Though it starts out as just another first-person shooter, it's got some cool play mechanics and optional objectives that shoot it a bit above average. Rather than running through each level and gunning down the endless waves of gang members, you can use your taser to arrest a few of them to unlock new levels and weaponry, or command nearby policemen or firemen in order to access new parts of the same level. It's pretty sweet.

The downside is that the game shows almost all of its tricks within the first couple of levels, leaving you to repeat many key sequences over and over again. Save the medic, use the fireman to break down the wooden door, save the civilian so he can throw a switch or fix some other problem... and then there's the hostage situation, which you see way too often throughout the game.

Basically, here's how the hostage scenario plays out. First, you'll come across a gangster using a hostage as a shield. Hold up your riot shield as he empties his clip into it. As he reloads, time slows down, and you take a shot at his head. He proceeds to drag his hostage to another area, and you follow. Repeat until one of you dies.

And yes, it gets old by the second time you do it. That's the story of *Urban Chaos*—it's an above-average shooter that hits a plateau early and stays there. | *Greg Sewart*

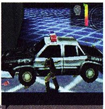
VERDICT Not the greatest first-person shooter on the PlayStation 2, but innovative and interesting enough to be worth a playthrough.

SCORE 3 | 5

Which player is making a tactical error?

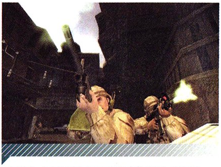
WAY BACK

Full Spectrum Warrior started life as a training program commissioned by the U.S. Army. An interesting bit of trivia: Legend has it that when the U.S. Army commissioned a military version of Atari's 1980 3D arcade hit, *Battlezone*, some programmers within the company refused to work on the project for moral reasons. Only two copies of this modified version were ever made.



CHAOTIC PAST

Oldsters may remember that Eidos released another game called *Urban Chaos* on the PS1 back in 2000. While that game was also about a cop fighting gangsters on the mean streets of Big City, USA, the two games aren't really related beyond the title.



FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR: TEN HAMMERS

THIS WAR GAME IS PURE HELL

| PUB. THQ DEV. Pandemic

ESRB M MSRP $49.99

War is really hell. But not for the reasons you may think. In the world of *Full Spectrum Warrior*, the word "hell" refers less to gun-toting militants trying to kill you and more to clunky controls, ugly visuals, and mundane, board-game play mechanics.

Full Spectrum Warrior is supposed to teach the player all about squad-based tactics during combat: flanking your enemies, finding cover, and working as a team to complete each new goal. And the original game did just that, though the set-in-stone rules of engagement took a lot of the excitement out of the experience. If an enemy had cover, there was no way you were flushing them out, but they'd stay still while your second team made a flanking maneuver. Each skirmish played out exactly the same.

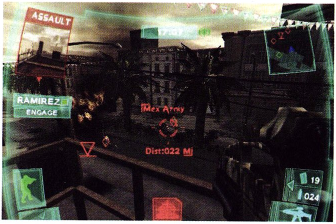
Ten Hammers does a bit to rectify the problem by giving us enemies that will actually change position and aren't completely invincible while behind cover. You can move to a first-person aiming mode now in order to pick off your foes whenever they happen to peek around the corner.

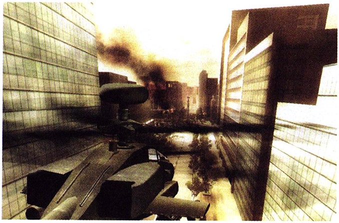
That'd be cool—if it made any sense. But along with these improvements come a whole slew of problems. The first-person aiming is accompanied by a red dot, which, no matter whether you can see your target or not, means you've got the kill if you hit the fire button at that moment. Enemies who are supposed to be smarter this time will sometimes fall back to a position you've occupied, as though they have no idea you're there. What's worse, sometimes you still can't take them out as they do this. Instead, they'll run right through you and the bullets you're unloading in their general direction.

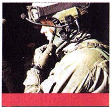
It's nice that Pandemic attempted to improve *Full Spectrum Warrior*, trying to make it feel more like a game and less like something based on military theory. But the host of said improvements take *FSW* from an interesting if tame combat simulator to an irritating way to spend an afternoon. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT A once-decent game destroyed by an ill-fated attempt to stick to war-video-game conventions.

SCORE 2 | 5







CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?
The Cross-Com technology that the PlayStation 2 game demonstrates so poorly is actually an honest-to-god development in military hardware. Here's hoping the real-world technology works better than it does in the game, though.

PUB. Ubisoft **DEV.** Ubisoft **ESRB** T **MSRP** $49.99

TOM CLANCY'S
GHOST RECON ADVANCED WARFIGHTER
GHOSTS OF CRAPPY GAMES PAST

What happened here?

If you've seen or played *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter* on the Xbox 360 or the PC, you'd be forgiven for getting excited over the prospect of a PlayStation 2 version. While it wouldn't be realistic to expect the same level of graphics, the general team-based, third-person gameplay is something the system is more than capable of delivering. Right?

Apparently not.

In the transition from the Xbox 360 and PC, *Advanced Warfighter* went from being an outstanding third-person shooter, set in a gigantic virtual city and full of interesting challenges requiring precise teamwork, to being a sluggish, ugly first-person shooter, featuring graphics that are barely up to PS2 standards from three years ago, horrible animation, and archaic level design.

The game tries to look like it's more than it really is. The idea behind the *Advanced Warfighter* moniker is that you're using a new heads-up display that helps you identify your enemies, your friends, your goals, and so on. However, in the PS2 version, the whole thing feels like a useless overlay that does more to confuse the onscreen action than it does to help the situation. And it does nothing to help you locate and fire on your enemies. You still don't get the telltale red diamond on your screen until you've aimed your reticule right at your adversary. And thanks to the awful graphics, picking out said adversaries without any sort of help is downright infuriating, especially when you're caught in the crossfire of all-but-invisible enemies.

Another embarrassing problem is the voice acting. Almost all of the main scenes are lifted directly from the Xbox 360 version of the game; these scenes generally include directions to specific waypoints or level goals. The sad part is that some of these directions actually turn out to be wrong—the character speaking tells you to go west when the direction you need to be heading is really north, for example.

That pretty much sums up the *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter* experience on the PlayStation 2. So many games look and play better on the system that this turkey's not worth your money. It's a sloppy, rushed port of a game that deserved better. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT Tom Clancy would be rolling over in his grave... if he were dead.

SCORE 1.5 | 5

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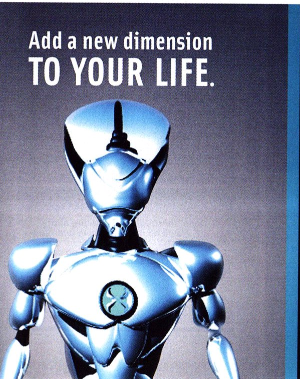

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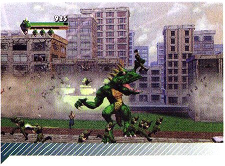
by Rick O'Connor



RAMPAGE: TOTAL DESTRUCTION

PLEASING TASTE, SOME MONSTERISM

| PUB. Midway DEV. Pipeworks

ESRB 10+ MSRP $19.99

As I sat down to tap out this review, I readied myself to rail on *Rampage: Total Destruction* for being a big waste of money. How dare Midway charge full price for such a shallow, repetitive game?

Then I checked the retail and realized this is a $20 game. That doesn't necessarily make it a better product, but it sure doesn't hurt, either.

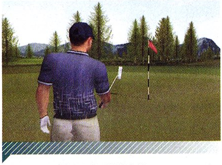
Total Destruction's greatest strength is that it faithfully re-creates the arcade experience of the 1986 original while sufficiently dressing up the graphics for the current generation of consoles. Smash through multiple cities, destroying helicopters, eating all manner of innocent bystanders, and laying waste to any buildings in your path. Good fun.

Good fun, that is, for about 20 minutes, at which point you'll wonder if the game is ever going to progress. The fact of the matter is that *Total Destruction*'s greatest weakness also happens to be its faithful re-creating of the arcade hit. *Rampage* was great in the arcade era, when single-button shooters and maze chases were all the rage. But by today's standards, the game wears thin very, very quickly. Even though you can upgrade your monsters by reaching special goals in each area, the entire game still comes down to climbing a building, beating the crap out of it until it crumbles, and repeating ad infinitum.

Trust me; it's not as much fun as the recent *King Kong* flick would have you believe, though it is a lot more fun to see the monsters in *Rampage* just eat the hot blonde rather than get all mushy around her. Still, even at a budget price, it's hard to recommend this game to anyone but the most hardcore of *Rampage* fans...if they even exist. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT The shiny new graphics can't hide the geriatric game underneath.

SCORE 2 | 5



REAL WORLD GOLF

A WORKOUT FOR MORE THAN YOUR FINGERS

| PUB. In2Games DEV. In2Games

ESRB E MSRP $69.99

As I approached the links—OK, the plastic box on my living room floor—dressed in my finest knickers, I realized this was not going to be an average golf game experience. I strapped on my Trak Gloves, straddled the Gametrak unit, and gripped the little plastic golf club, ready to take my first swing.

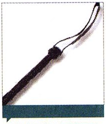
Real World Golf is basically a golf simulator. As a former assistant golf pro, I tested the accuracy by trying out the driving range first. After swinging as hard as I could for a few balls, I discovered that taking it slow is better for your game. Warmed up, and bit sore, I was ready to hit the links, which offered different game options: normal rounds with multiple scoring methods, tournaments, and party golf. None of the courses are real golf courses, but the variety of styles and challenges is enjoyable.

Beginners can check out the short tutorials available with Martin the *Real World Golf* pro, but you're not going to get much in the way of real learning here. There are three different levels (amateur, semipro, and pro), but as an amateur I struggled to hit the ball far enough to win tournaments. With pro clubs, I was as good at simulated golf as at real golf, but there were sometimes problems with questionable unplayable lies and weird ball bounces; I also had to alter some of my swing styles to play well.

RWG, with fewer options and less sophisticated graphics than *Tiger Woods*, will not attract the nongolfers. Adding more options, better graphics, real golf courses, and better golf education would improve the experience and lure more toward this game. However, it is an exceptional golf simulation for enthusiasts and would be a cheap way for people considering golf to explore the sport. There is no substitute for the real golf experience, but if you are looking for a winter activity, need practice before the next round, or are craving golf on a rainy day, strap on the gloves and play *Real World Golf*. | *Brian Stryzek*

VERDICT Good, but better for golfers than for gamers.

SCORE 3.5 | 5

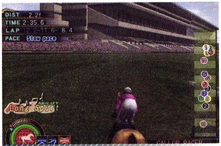


WHIP IT GOOD

Those persons who had the foresight to preorder *Gallop Racer 2006* on Tecmo's website were the lucky recipients of their very own riding whip. That should come in handy for, uh, playing with the ponies.

NO GIRLS ALLOWED

You get to choose from several predesigned golfers, but women players (or men who like to play games as females) won't get to play with a female avatar until they unlock one.



GALLOP RACER 2006

ROUGH OUT OF THE GATE, BETTER DOWN THE STRETCH

| PUB. Tecmo DEV. Tecmo

ESRB E MSRP $39.99

I've always found the *Gallop Racer* series interesting. I don't necessarily mean the games, but the fact that Tecmo, creator of some of the best hardcore action titles around (*Ninja Gaiden, Dead or Alive, Fatal Frame*), is the publisher of the long-running horse-racing line. It doesn't seem to fit.

And yet it does. Because—aside from the business fact that horse racing is big in Japan—*Gallop Racer*, like most Tecmo games, comes with a steep learning curve. This hasn't changed with *Gallop Racer 2006* (the eighth release in the series). Despite its arcade look, *GR06* is a hardcore horse-racing simulation with a significant—though methinks unnecessary—depth.

You'll begin with the overthought create-a-character setup (do you really need hundreds of choices for shirt pattern and color?) and then choose your racer from several thousand horse types, which you can breed and train through retirement. You also choose your jockey.

Then you race. If there's a perfectly intuitive control set default for the PS2, it wasn't used in *GR06*. As with *Gallop Racers* past, I tried and failed to win over a course of many races. This is because my right thumb kept hitting the X button to accelerate and the Square button to brake. Wrong. X switches hands; Square shoulders your whip. But even after you get used to the controls, be careful: they're so sensitive that it's easy to exhaust your horse quickly. To be fair, while the control set isn't user-configurable, the game does let you choose to use the analog sticks as reins (actually a bit easier) or whip-only (the AI does the rest).

For hardcore horse racers (and who isn't?), *Gallop Racer 2006* can surely be said to have it all. Several game modes let you run in classic races, while others let you race your horse against real-life thoroughbreds. *GR06* may be tough, but its thoroughness should be appreciated. | *Tom Byron*

WIN Deep, thorough horse-racing sim
PLACE Has it all, but may have overdone the "all" part
SHOW Surprisingly steep learning curve

SCORE 3.5 | 5

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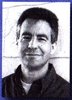

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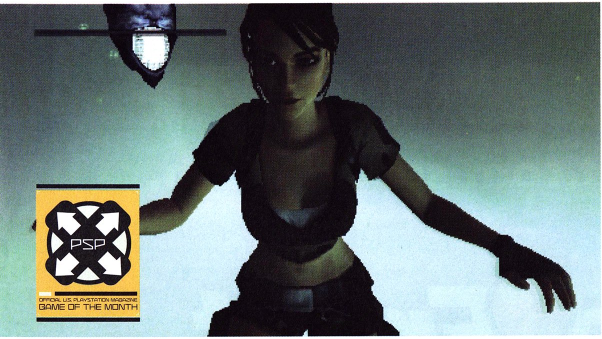

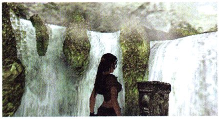

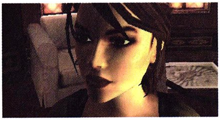

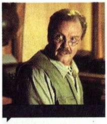

PUB. Eidos DEV. Crystal Dynamics/Buzz Monkey ESRB T MSRP $39.99

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

POCKET RAIDER

Are you a rabid *OPM* fan who has a subscription that lasts until 2082 and can name the review scores of every PS1 game by heart? Then you probably remember Dana's two-page *Tomb Raider: Legend* review extravaganza in Issue #104 (where it snagged a respectable 4.5/5). If this is your first issue, then here's a quick rundown of that review:

A. Yay, Tomb Raider doesn't suck!
B. Graphics look snazzy!
C. Controls are good for the most part!
D. Puzzles are neat!
E. Plot is about King Arthur!
F. Motorcycle sequences are long and kinda annoying!
G. Combat is kinda blah due to not-bright AI and easy bosses!
H. Cliff-hanger endings are weak!

Since *Tomb Raider: Legend* is almost the same on the PSP as the PS2, the above still applies. New to the PSP version are Tomb Trials. These are short little challenges ranging from getting from Point A to Tomb B or gathering up all the treasure items. This is the part of the game that remembers that it's a PSP title; these trials make for short bursts of action gameplay that fit in your pocket. You can even compete head-to-head with a fellow PSP raider, so not only are these quick minigames, but they're wireless multiplayer minigames.

Alas, while the Tomb Trials are a decent reminder of the PSP's portability, the regular game shows its rough transition to the PSP. You know how developers and *OPM* editors like to talk about how the PSP looks and performs almost as well as a home console? Sadly, the key word is still "almost"; in *TRL*'s case, that means that while it looks pretty nice, it doesn't move so nice. That might sound harsh, but the framerate does suffer a bit, and gameplay oscillates between playable and choppy. This choppiness tends to come at the most inopportune times, such as when you're making a careful series of jumps or shooting three bad dudes.

Also, as with any PS2-to-PSP transition, there's the question of how best to consolidate two analog sticks down to a single nub. In the case of *TRL*, the remapping of controls (combine Square and the nub to control the camera; use the D-pad plus Triangle for grenades instead of L2) actually works fine. It's just that the nub is significantly different from the analog stick (its cone of movement is smaller, which makes it more sensitive), so it's actually more difficult to line Lara up for jumps—and in the case of the motorcycle sequences, it's way too twitchy and makes for frequent bike-meets-rock accidents.

So, basically, *TRL* is a good game that kind of lost its way when it came over to the PSP. Yeah, it's cool to have Lara in your pocket, but next time, I'd prefer a less arthritic Lara. *Thierry Nguyen*

PROS It's a darn good *Tomb Raider*...
CONS ...that runs slower and controls looser than we'd like.

SCORE 3.5 | 5

REWRITING HISTORY

In the first *Tomb Raider* games, Lara's parents are alive and well, waiting for her to quit raiding tombs and come back to the ancestral family home so she can marry the Earl of Farringdon. However, as of the *Tomb Raider* movies, the story has changed so that Lara's mother is killed when she and Lara are in a plane crash in the Himalayas; Lara's father later goes missing in Cambodia.

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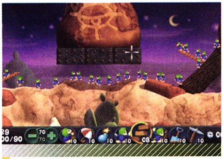


LEMMINGS

ANOTHER PORT PLAYING FOLLOW THE LEADER

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Team17
ESRB E MSRP $39.99

I think I can basically sum up everything significant there is to know about this game in three words: It's portable *Lemmings*.

If you were on the cutting edge of PC gaming back in the day, this may serve as a delicious dose of nostalgia for you. If not, you may have already played many of these levels in some Flash game somewhere in the bowels of the Internet.

The game has a certain undeniable charm, to be sure. The original levels (all 120 of them—though some are reused with different settings) have a cute, clever spirit to them, although if this is your first time through these levels, you'll find yourself occasionally outwitted by the designers. (Chances are good, though, that if you've been a gamer for very long, it won't be your first time through these levels.)

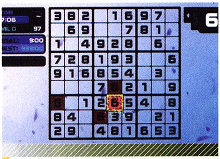
The new levels, on the other hand, seem almost sadistically hard by comparison, primarily because they seem to rely too much on raw trial and error. With the original levels, you can usually look at the layout and figure out precisely what you need to do without having to do too many trial runs. But for the new ones, you'll spend far too much time nailing down precise timing (in a game that should really not require any kind of twitch reflex) and feeling like the level designers are cheating you out of a satisfying experience.

The only real draw here is the startlingly robust level-creation tool. You—yes, you—can create a level with every bit as much detail as those packed in with the disc...and you can trade them with your friends via an infrastructure or ad hoc connection through the simple, elegant online interface.

Is that enough to warrant the entry price? For me, no. But you budding game designers might feel differently. | *Joe Rybicki*

VERDICT It's portable *Lemmings*. With a really good level-creation tool.

SCORE 3|5



GO! SUDOKU

ACTUALLY, DON'T GO

PUB. Ubisoft DEV. Sumo Digital
ESRB E MSRP $29.99

For those who don't know, sudoku is kind of a crossword puzzle with numbers. With puzzles taking less than 10 minutes apiece to fill out, it's a great fit for handhelds.

One of the things that I was worried about, filling in the grid quickly without the ability to write or type the correct numeral, isn't an issue—the game's controls are well structured, with quick flicks of the right and left shoulder buttons to get to the appropriate number working elegantly. The game's got a huge number of puzzles at all difficulty levels, and Ubisoft has set up a server so that gamers can download additional puzzles, offering potentially endless replayability. A couple of multiplayer modes—Pass the PSP and versus—add fun variety, even if they're not the real meat of the game.

However, the game has a big problem that'll drive any sudoku player up the wall: the inability to turn off an autocorrect function that immediately tells you whether or not the number you've entered into the square is correct. *Go! Sudoku* keeps you from leaning on this too much by allowing a certain number of free mistakes before penalizing your time, but it just makes the game too easy. Also an issue is that once the battery charge drops below a certain level, an "Attention" screen will pop up every four to five minutes, obscuring the screen and disrupting your concentration. It's annoying as hell, and it makes the game very unfun—so unfun that I had to go away until my PSP charged back up. I'm no game designer, but both seem like things that could've been easily taken care of, so it's perplexing—and frustrating—that the game was allowed to go out the door in this condition.

Fix those problems, and *Go! Sudoku* is great, but right now, those issues frustrate any enjoyment. I'll stick to paper-and-pencil versions of sudoku until a cleaned-up sequel appears. | *Dana Jongewaard*

VERDICT Sudoku for dummies who have well-charged batteries.

SCORE 2|5

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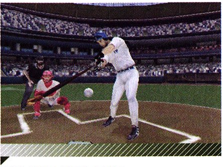


MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2K6

A GREAT DIAMOND IN A CRAPPY SETTING

PUB. 2K Sports DEV. Kush Games/Visual Concepts
ESRB E MSRP $39.99

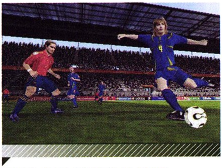
Major League Baseball 2K6 has more gameplay modes than you'd want to try to shake a stick at, limited infrastructure wireless in addition to ad hoc, a ton of management and gameplay, and reasonably fun play mechanics. And that's really about all it has, because this game is all about the substance of the gameplay around the diamond—to the exclusion of being a visually appealing or particularly approachable game.

2K6 doesn't look horrible, but no effort has been made to capture the splendor of baseball. You'll see the same pitcher-cam viewpoint for hours, with only occasional replays, and listen to the excellent, but always a few seconds late, color commentary. The same ugly cardboard crowd will sit in the stadiums, making no noise other then a low rumble regardless of what's happening on the field. Nice little control touches, like reversing what the Advance and Retreat buttons do midplay, make some "features" like BaseBurner mode hindrances, not features.

All the time that could've gone into presentation and perfect control instead went to giving gamers an immense amount of baseball. Developer Kush Games changed some of the mechanics from the console versions to accommodate for the PSP controls, but other than that, you've got a full baseball game with *2K6*. Manage your franchise from season to season, use the Inside Edge scouting feature to acquire meaningful player data, or play through the entire season as a manager instead of from the ballplayers' perspectives—there's a ton of baseball here. But without great camera angles when you make a play, the roar of the crowd when you screw up, or any of the other touches that engage most baseball fans—or even a helpful, well-written manual—it's really a game for the hardcore fan. Maybe the next generation of PSP sports games will manage both content and presentation. | *Patrick Joynt*

PSP HAIKU Why can't we get games
With both style and great gameplay
And more wireless play?

SCORE 3 | 5



2006 FIFA WORLD CUP

BABY'S FIRST SOCCER ON THE GO

PUB. Electronic Arts DEV. EA Canada
ESRB E MSRP $39.99

EA has done a bang-up job of moving its new soccer game onto the PSP and has actually made it feel like a game built for the platform by including ad hoc and infrastructure wireless play, its custom music player that actually lets you enjoy the game's world-music soundtrack when you don't have time to play, and an engine that keeps the machine moving at a good pace. What EA failed to do is make *2006 FIFA World Cup* a soccer game that's quite worth all the cool stuff that ships with it.

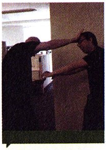
The core game closely resembles soccer and contains numerous soccer things: on-the-fly tactics that you can apply on offense or defense, lots of team management, star players who you really should take advantage of but who don't single-handedly dominate, and a decent attempt to nail the "every shot is unique" animation style that *Winning Eleven* has mastered.

The issue is that all the extras are fun while the core soccer game is a dumbed-down version of actual soccer. I really like the EA Trax player, the actual infrastructure play, and the quick load times, but the best tactics are to through-pass to star players until you're close enough to shoot. The controls have all this complexity that makes it seem like the game is going to be like *Winning Eleven*, but it's a really simple version of soccer. So simple that it doesn't feel like real soccer, but a kiddie version to help people learn about soccer.

The PSP's infamous nub isn't as deadly to gameplay here as it is in shooters, but it's still not a real analog stick, and that hurts your ability to take advantage of any of the advanced stuff as well. You never feel really certain that you've given the command you want, or set your on-field strategy correctly. Overall, it's a great pick-up-and-play game, but I don't want to give up depth just because a game is portable. | *Patrick Joynt*

PROS Easy to pick up and play, tons of extras
CONS Depth of gameplay is what makes sports great

SCORE 2.5 | 5



IF I RAN THE INDUSTRY...

No handheld game—not a single one—would have an automatically loading demo mode. These evolved from arcade machines' "attract" mode, which was intended to lure passing players. I do not want passing players lured to my PSP, thanks very much.

BRAZIL

Brazil has taken the World Cup five times in the 76 years since the tournament began. That means they've won almost a third of the tournaments. And they had Pelé! The soccer world isn't fair.

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WORLD POKER TOUR

BET BIG ON LOAD TIMES

PUB. 2K Sports DEV. Coresoft
ESRB T MSRP $29.99

Let me tell you a story about the load times in *World Poker Tour*. I left the game sitting on the main menu once and came back just in time to see a loading screen come up. Turns out the game had decided to go into demo mode. Two full minutes later, said demo mode appeared. So I quit back out to the main menu...which took another two minutes. People, we have got to learn how to optimize loading on the PSP, OK?

Get past the interminable load times and you'll find a game that appears to have improved upon its PS2 predecessor. The big change is simply in the way that your opponents play—and especially in the way they react to your play. In the PS2 game, it's laughably easy to push your opponents around. Raise to three or four times the big blind and you'll see anyone without a true monster hand run away like you just pulled a gun on 'em. But in playing this version, I was pleasantly surprised by how frequently I got called by relatively marginal hands.

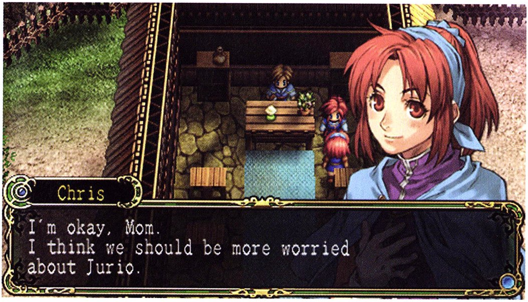
You still see a few too many instances of checking all the way around the table and some other odd examples of poor AI behavior. Overall, though, it feels like a much more realistic—and, hence, more challenging—game than its PS2 predecessor. Too bad the interesting (though not really useful) facial-control system is gone from this version.

In terms of the hand-to-hand gameplay, I'm pleased to report that the "fold and skip" option returns, which allows you to completely skip the rest of a hand that you've dropped out of. This—along with the still-annoying six-hand tables—keeps the game moving along at a nicely brisk pace. More brisk than live poker, to be sure—but this is, after all, a videogame.

We're still waiting for the definitive poker game, but *World Poker Tour* is certainly moving in the right direction. | *Joe Rybicki*

VERDICT While it's still more fun than realistic, a few smart moves make *WPT* superior to its PS2 predecessor. If you don't mind insane load times, add half a point.

SCORE 3.5 | 5



Chris

I'm okay, Mom.
I think we should be more worried about Jurio.

Big Boar
HP 31
MP 33
POWER

| PUB. Namco Bandai DEV. Falcom ESRB T MSRP $39.99

THE LEGEND OF HEROES II: PROPHECY OF THE MOONLIGHT WITCH

NOTHING MORE, NOTHING LESS THAN YOUR USUAL RPG

Stop me if you've heard this one before.

You're a spunky young lad who goes on a pilgrimage to touch a bunch of crystals in order to see your dreams. As you zip around the world on this journey, you learn about a big ol' prophecy from a mysterious witchlike lady, and you find yourself involved in something bigger than just a walking tour of the world.

Now staple that story onto a colorful little role-playing game filled with towns, shops, turn-based combat, and dungeons. Sounds like your bog-standard RPG—and, well, that's what you get with *The Legend of Heroes II* (which is actually a prequel to the previous *Legend of Heroes* PSP game).

The PSP is lacking when it comes to a decent roster of RPGs, and you can certainly do worse than *Legend of Heroes II*. Sure, there isn't a *Final Fantasy* or even a *Suikoden* (yet), but if you're jonesing for something adventurous and Japanese to slip into your pocket, this fits the bill. And if you're one of those crazy Japanese readers who imported the game, you'll be pleased to find out that the combat system has been changed from the Japanese version. Instead of a real-time system where you give a command and watch your characters fight on their own, you get a normal turn-based battle system where you issue attacks, magic spells, skills, and finishing moves (which use up a power meter that gets filled during combat).

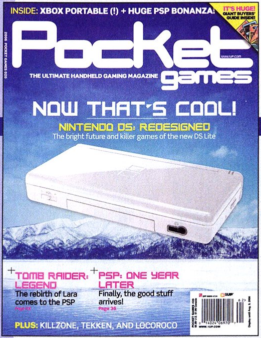
Additionally, you can take a pet along for the ride, and if you feed it certain foods and keep it happy, your pet will occasionally sweep in with a special attack during battle. Oh, and if you can't stand random battles, don't worry—you can see enemies on the field before fighting them, and if you're a lot stronger than they are, they might even run away from you!

So there you have it: a typical Japanese RPG. With pets. | *Thierry Nguyen*

HP 44
MP 34
POWER
HP 34
MP 42
POWER

VERDICT Neither legendary nor infamous, it's just a solidly constructed RPG for the PSP.

SCORE 3 | 5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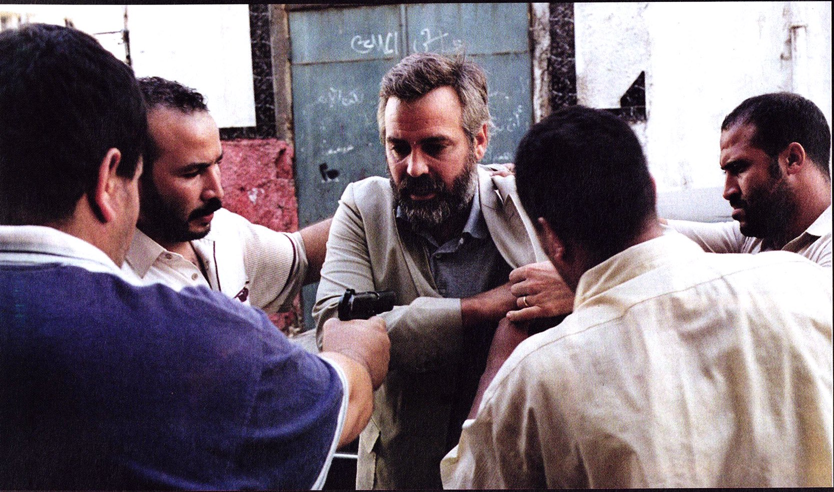


[**George Clooney, Matt Damon**]

SYRIANA

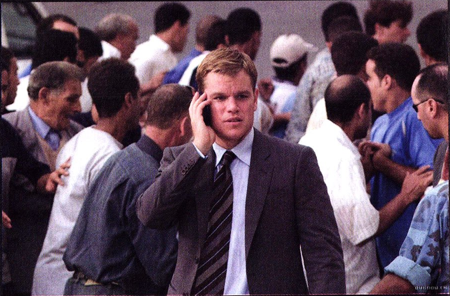
GOOD ≠ FEEL-GOOD

by john scalzi

At the moment I'm writing this, gas prices are at about $3 a gallon; who knows where they are as you're reading this. (Well, *you* do—and if you don't, drive down and check, if you've got enough in your tank for the trip.) If you're wondering why gas prices are where they are, perhaps watching *Syriana* will help—or, then again, maybe it won't. This film is a core sample of the shadowy world in which oil deals get done. But rather than clear, defined strata, you get a jumbled, confusing mix—you can see what's there; you just can't see how it all got there or how it all relates to everything else. And you eventually suspect that what you *don't* see is what's really important.

The film is written and directed by Stephen Gaghan, who got an Oscar for writing the movie version of *Traffic*—and like that film, *Syriana* offers a collage of characters whose motives and aims aren't always moral or clear. George Clooney won an Oscar for his role as a CIA operative neck-deep in Middle East intrigue, but his character is just one of many. The cast includes Chris Cooper and Christopher Plummer as oil execs trying to merge companies to get at some oil, and Matt Damon plays an oil trader who, among other things, exploits a personal tragedy for business gain in such a horrifying, callous manner that you'll have a hard time believing you heard what he just said. This is not a feel-good movie.

Nor should it be. *Syriana* is what one suspects the oil business is at the moment—a sort of grand game where nation-states and their individual proxies wrestle like animals in ways that don't make sense but matter desperately nevertheless. And if this movie seems disjointed and amoral to you, think about this: Movies are almost always *less* complicated than the real world.



SCORE

5 | 5

FIREWALL

Harrison Ford, Virginia Madsen

On one hand, it's nice that we think that 60 is the new 40. On the other hand, we believe this, but I'm pretty sure our knees and muscles *don't*. So when Harrison Ford morphs from a terrorized bank executive to an adventure hero avenging the kidnapping of his family by bank robbers, I can't help but wonder how much time he needed between takes. Yes, he was Indiana Jones. That was a very long time ago.

SCORE 3|5

UNDERWORLD: EVOLUTION

Kate Beckinsale, Scott Speedman

The good news here is that Kate Beckinsale is back, wearing leather, and being hot in that unapproachable, gothy way that gets folks all hot and bothered. Call me shallow, but I could basically watch an hour and a half of our friend Kate dressed like that—doing nothing but stretching—and I'd call it time well spent.

The bad news is that *Underworld: Evolution* is somehow actually *less* interesting than 90 minutes of *The Kate Beckinsale Yoga in Leather Show*; the rather confused plotline of the first film, with the vampires and werewolves beating on each other, gets extended and even less comprehensible here. And while the goth kids may not care one way or the other, I find myself bored beyond belief. A waste of Beckinsale. And of leather.

SCORE 2|5

GLORY ROAD

Josh Lucas, Derek Luke

This is your fairly standard "underdog goes all the way" sort of film, where you know going in what's going to happen with the basketball team in question (in part because it's based on the historical matchup between Texas Western and Kentucky). It's also a film that reminds us that 40 years ago, college hoops teams in the U.S. didn't field an entire squad of black kids—because it just wasn't done. Times change; that's a good thing.

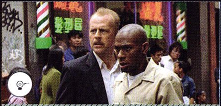
SCORE 3.5|5

KISS KISS BANG BANG

Robert Downey Jr., Val Kilmer

This is the movie that all the film dorks will be quoting ad nauseam for the next couple of years—just like they've been quoting *Napoleon Dynamite*—because it's essentially the same sort of setup: There's a plot here, sort of (it's a detective story), but it's just an aside to give filmmakers a reason to have characters says witty, funny things onscreen. And no, this is not a *bad* thing. Enjoy. Quote. Enjoy again.

SCORE 3.5|5



16 BLOCKS

Bruce Willis, Mos Def

How hard is it for a detective to transport a con 16 city blocks to testify before a grand jury? Apparently, much harder than you might think. This film didn't set the world on fire in the theaters, but it's surprisingly smart and interesting—and that's mostly due to Bruce Willis, who has improbably aged into a very interesting actor. Mos Def, who is here in the role of the con, works as well. You should check it out.

SCORE 3.5|5

THE HILLS HAVE EYES

Ted Levine, Kathleen Quinlan

The strip-mining of horror classics of the '70s continues unabated; this time, it's a remake of Wes Craven's 1977 creepster with the mutants in the hills and the blood and the screaming and the slash-slash-slash-kill. Look, this is simple. Each time you see a "new" horror film coming out, check IMDb and see if it's a remake. If it is (and it probably will be), rent the original version. Because it's much better. Really.

SCORE 1|5

THE PINK PANTHER

Steve Martin, Kevin Kline

This is the best *Pink Panther* film not to star Peter Sellers, but since every other *Pink Panther* film not starring Peter Sellers is about as fun as a forced march through alligator-infested swamps with bacon wrapped about your calves, that's not saying much. Indeed, this film is as fun a forced march through alligator-infested swamps *without* bacon wrapped around your calves. Mmmm...bacon. Anyway, you have better things to do.

SCORE 2|5

ULTRAVIOLET

Milla Jovovich, William Fichtner

This is how bad this sci-fi action flick is: It's so bad that, as the film unfolded, I imagined Uwe Boll watching it in his subterranean lair of dreck—and *nodding with approval*. Director Kurt Wimmer needs to hand in his director's card (and his writer's card, too, since he wrote the thing) and spend the next decade feeding gruel to hungry orphans in order to get his karmic balance restored. Milla Jovovich, the film's star, should help out, too.

SCORE .5|5

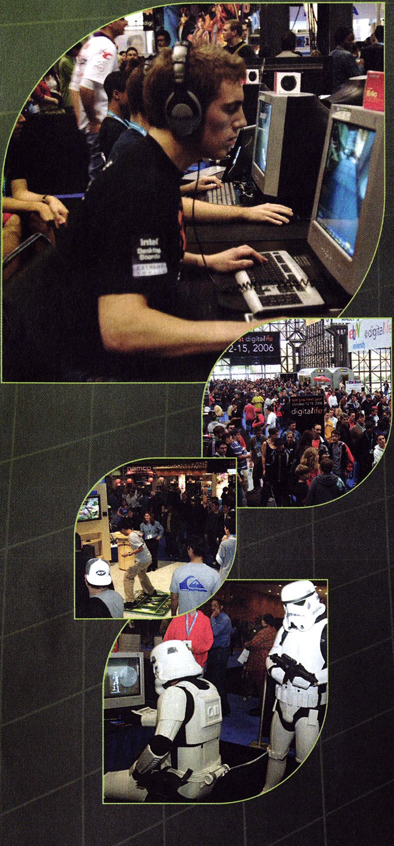
DVD RELEASE

June 6
Firewall
Glory Road
Underworld: Evolution
June 13
16 Blocks
Kiss Kiss Bang Bang
The Pink Panther
June 20
The Hills Have Eyes
Syriana
June 27
Ultraviolet

UMD RELEASE

June 6
Glory Road
Underworld: Evolution
June 13
The Pink Panther
June 20
The Hills Have Eyes
June 27
Ultraviolet

Don't let the competition beat you at your own game



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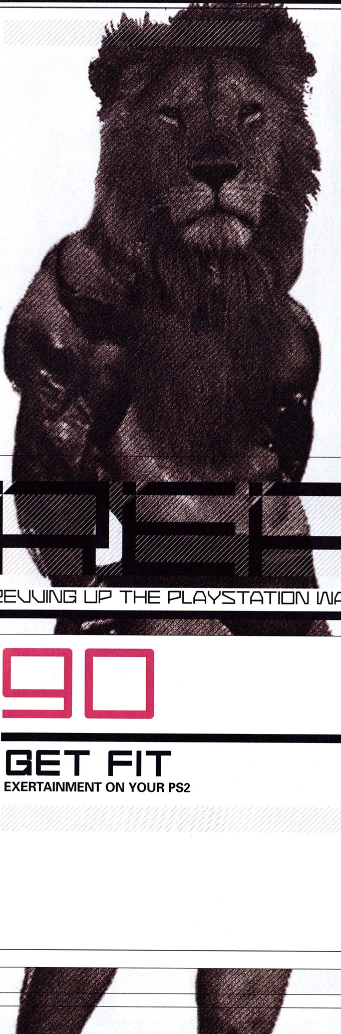

REPLAY

REVVING UP THE PLAYSTATION WAYBACK MACHINE

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GET FIT

EXERTAINMENT ON YOUR PS2

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PlayStation 2
MagicGate
MEMORY CARD
2
1

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

get in shape with your PS2

Ask someone to start listing stereotypes about gamers, and it won't take them very long—usually right after "nerdy" and "homicidal"—to say "out of shape." While this is certainly a generalization, it's tough to ignore the fact that games demand lengthy stretches of time spent sedentarily. But then, that's also true of television, the Internet, and even practicing a musical instrument.

The problem is, of all forms of sedentary activities, games get the worst rap. If you want your medical study or television news report to garner as much attention as possible, you tie it to videogames—regardless of whether your results show any negative effects specific to games. After the California Department of Health Services distributed a pamphlet for parents that featured a list of energetic and creative activities, a CBS News report misconstrued the list—whether deliberately or not—as a how-to on "keeping your child videogame free."

Because such one-sided criticisms have been leveled practically since the birth of home videogames, the industry has always found itself having to present at least some kind of healthy image, whether by putting together its own informational pamphlets that encourage moderation or by actually making games that are controlled by physical exertion. Since the days of the NES, publishers have experimented with exercise-oriented games. But only now, and especially on the PS2, are such games becoming big business—not only in the home, but also in institutions like elementary schools and fitness centers.

In the beginning, there was *DDR*—in Japan, at least. *Dance Dance Revolution*'s innovative gameplay, in which players "dance" to hot electronic beats by some of Japan's most talented remix artists by stomping on a metal floor pad, had been taking that country by storm since 1998. When Konami brought the experience into homes, it did so on Japan's most popular console at the time: the PS1. But the giant metal platform couldn't fit in tiny Japanese houses and apartments, so Konami engineered a soft, light pad meant for shoeless stomping.

> OF ALL FORMS OF SEDENTARY ACTIVITIES, GAMES GET THE WORST RAP.

As *DDR* mania began to spread and Konami began to release more "mixes" (discs of additional songs) in arcades and on the PS1, it didn't take the company very long to realize that *Dance Dance Revolution*, apart from being great fun, was a great workout. By *Dance Dance Revolution 3rd Mix*, released in 1999, a Diet mode had been added to the home game. In this mode, the game counts the number of calories a player burns while dancing. If players want to burn a certain number of calories, they can set a goal and play until reaching it.

Diet mode has been in every iteration of *DDR* since, and when the

TOOLS FOR GETTING FIT

1 | DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION EXTREME 2

Manufacturer: Konami
Site: www.konami.com
Price: $39.99 stand-alone, or $59.99 bundled with a dancepad
Fitness features: This and other home versions of the popular arcade dancing game feature a Workout mode that counts calories and lets you set your own daily exercise goals, then sweat to the oldies (and newies).

2 | YOURSELF FITNESS

Manufacturer: responDESIGN
Site: www.yourselffitness.com
Price: $34.99
Fitness features: Meant to be a replacement for traditional fitness videos—and aimed squarely at a female audience—*Yourself* gives players a virtual physical trainer in Maya, who evaluates your fitness level, then creates a varied series of workouts for you to follow every day.

3 | EYETOY: KINETIC

Manufacturer: Sony CEA
Site: www.eyetoykinetic.com
Price: $49.99 bundled with an EyeToy camera
Fitness features: Codeveloped with Nike Motionworks, this EyeToy game gives you a workout taken from such disciplines as yoga and Pilates. And if you aren't performing up to expectations, *Kinetic* will know. The camera sees all.

4 | GAMEBIKE

Manufacturer: Cateye
Site: www.cateyefitness.com
Price: $349 and up
Fitness features: The Cateye GameBike is a stationary exercise bike that lets you play practically any existing racing game simply by pedaling like crazy. There is also a Pro version available, meant for institutional use, which has a sturdier frame.

5 | NEORACER

Manufacturer: Neoracer
Site: www.neoracer.com
Price: About $210
Fitness features: The Neoracer bike's tiny form lets you store it easily, and you can even put it on a table and pedal with your hands. But you have to find a chair that's the right height if you want to bike your best.

6 | KILOWATT

Manufacturer: Powergrid Fitness
Site: www.powergridfitness.com
Price: $1,195 and up
Fitness features: Push on the Kilowatt's alloy steel control bar, and you'll move your in-game character around—and work every muscle in your body doing it. One player reported that he felt like he'd just had a full workout after only minutes of using it.

7 | GAMERCYCLE

Manufacturer: XMAT
Site: www.gamercycle.com
Price: $299
Fitness features: Hook the GamerCycle up to your PS2's video input and you'll only be able to see the game in progress while you're pedaling away. A parental-lock feature lets Mom or Dad disable the GamerCycle after Junior's had his daily exercise.

series debuted in America in 2000, the mode (renamed Workout for the U.S. release) was a prominent feature. Stories about American gamers who had shed inches off their waistlines began to creep into news broadcasts, and the "exertainment" boom was born. RedOctane, manufacturer of high-end dancepads and publisher of the *DDR* clone *In the Groove*, has an entire website dedicated to the phenomenon: www.GetUpMove.com.

But videogames requiring physical movement on the part of the player don't have to restrict their gameplay to stomping around on the floor like a crazy person—you can wave your arms around like a crazy person, too. Sony introduced this concept in 2003 with the EyeToy, a USB camera that sits atop the PS2 and captures a player's body movements. The first crop of games, including such ill-named titles as *Play*, *Groove*, and *AntiGrav*, proved to be quite a workout as players flailed to karate-chop ninjas, hit drum beats, and pilot hoverboards.

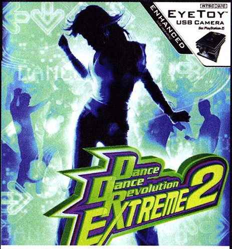
But only later, in 2005, did Sony introduce *EyeToy: Kinetic*, a workout program developed in coordination with the fitness masters at Nike. Players dodge, punch, and kick a series of onscreen targets as the game measures their physical fitness. A similar program, *Yourself Fitness*, was released last year as well. But rather than disguise fitness as an interactive videogame, *Yourself* is a noninteractive (though quite exhaustive and fully customizable) replacement for fitness videos and aerobics TV programs.

Yourself's virtual fitness instructor, Maya, first evaluates your fitness level (on the honor system—you're expected to put in accurate values for your height, your weight, and the number of push-ups you can manage), then creates a customized workout program complete with a daily progress chart, relaxing yoga cooldown routines, and even meal plans with more than 1,400 healthy recipes.

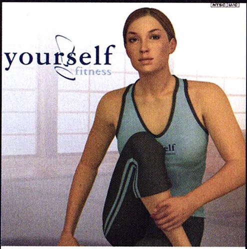
> SCHOOLS ARE BEGINNING TO INCLUDE DDR IN THEIR PHYS-ED CURRICULA.

As the wide variety of exertainment games has grown in popularity, the gaming industry has embraced the attention. For the last two years, Konami has sponsored the Cardio PlayZone at the International Consumer Electronics Show, a special section of the show floor featuring fitness-game products. And in 2005, Konami announced a partnership with 24 Hour Fitness, which saw copies of *Dance Dance Revolution Extreme 2* placed in the gym chain's locations nationwide.

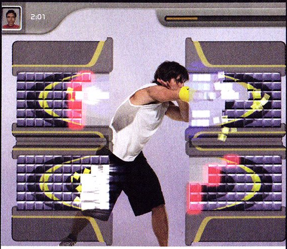
In fact, it's not just through commercial partnerships that fitness institutions are learning to love exercise games. School districts across the country are beginning to include *Dance Dance Revolution* in their physical education curricula. Last year, the Redlands, CA, school



1 | DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION EXTREME 2



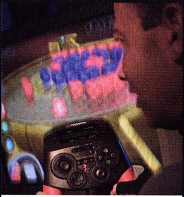
2 | YOURSELF FITNESS



3 | EYETOY: KINETIC

4 | GAMEBIKE

5 | NEORACER



6 | KILOWATT

7 | GAMERCYCLE

system made headlines for a pilot program that replaced traditional gym class with 45 minutes of *DDR* and *EyeToy: Play*.

Redlands director of elementary education Sue Buster told Wired News, "One of the things being blamed for childhood obesity is videogames, so this is fighting fire with fire." Ultimately, Buster asserted, the real culprit isn't videogames per se—it's that today's children just have nowhere to go to exercise. In addition to using *DDR* and the EyeToy in schools, Buster and a local nutritionist hope to team up and open an exertainment center for area children.

But it's not just *DDR* dancepads and EyeToy cameras. Other, more complex peripherals are giving the fitness-minded a new way to play on the PS2. The GameBike, produced by Cateye Fitness, is a typical stationary exercise bike, but with a twist: Plug it into your PS2, and you can accelerate in most racing games by pedaling.

Another device, the Neoracer, operates under a similar principle. But instead of being shaped like a full exercise bike, it's actually a set of pedals that stand on the floor underneath a chair. This makes it much less expensive than the GameBike, although you do have to supply your own seating. Gamers interested in comparison shopping between different game accessory bikes can go to www.gamecycles.com, a store specializing in the products.

But what if you're not into racing games? Not to worry; a company called Powergrid Fitness has you covered. Its product, called the Kilowatt, is an exercise machine that replicates the function of the PS2's analog stick...but makes you work much harder to get it moving. By positioning yourself against the back brace of the machine and pushing on the controller, you can control characters in the game while giving your entire body a massive workout.

Finally, while the GamerCycle may look like a Cateye GameBike in form, it has a different function. Rather than controlling the game directly, the recumbent stationary bicycle is plugged into the video input between the game console and television signal. If the pedals are being turned, the game appears on the TV screen. But as soon as the player stops pedaling, the video cuts out.

These products are all intended for home use. But as more fitness centers begin to include exercise games, these same manufacturers have made sure to develop sturdier, more expensive versions of these peripherals that can withstand lasting, public abuse. Powergrid sells a Pro version of the Kilowatt for gym use, and Cateye offers a similarly enhanced version of its GameBike. Cateye is even developing for fitness centers *Dance Dance Revolution* pads that are designed to take more abuse than even Konami's arcade machines.

In the end, it's still tough to convince a sedentary person to get off the couch and start moving, whether they're a videogamer, compulsive TV watcher, or Internet addict. But for the right type of person, fitness games could be the magic bullet. When games combine the just-one-more-game compulsion that makes them so addictive with a sense of real accomplishment, the pounds start to come off. | Chris Kohler

HISTORY OF EXERTAINMENT

The industry's been struggling to come up with marketable fitness controllers ever since the Atari 2600, which had a controller called Foot Craz that was very much like a *DDR* pad. The NES had the Power Pad, the Genesis had the Activator (a crude motion-sensing platform), and the wealthy had the SNES-based Life Fitness Exertainment System.

Kazunori Yamauchi likes fast, expensive vehicles. If you've played any of Polyphony Digital's *Gran Turismo* games, this fact should come as no surprise to you. *Tourist Trophy*, however, *was* a surprise: a motorcycle game—and one that failed to live up to *GT*'s high standards. We caught up with Yamauchi at a recent event to find out what prompted his studio to move in a two-wheeled direction.

RÉSUMÉ

Motor Toon Grand Prix (1994, PS1)
Motor Toon Grand Prix 2 (1996, PS1)
Gran Turismo (1997, PS1)
Gran Turismo 2 (1999, PS1)
Omega Boost (1999, PS1)
Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec (2001, PS2)
Gran Turismo 4 (2004, PS2)
Tourist Trophy (2006, PS2)

SPEED FREAK

KAZUNORI YAMAUCHI TALKS TOURIST TROPHY AND THE FUTURE OF GRAN TURISMO

OPM What was the deciding factor to use motorcycles for *Tourist Trophy*?

KAZUNORI YAMAUCHI The curiosity of wanting to technically try motorcycles has been something that's always interested us while developing *Gran Turismo* with the cars; someday, we wanted to move over to the bikes. It's also very similar to the curiosity [with cars] that we had when we first started *Gran Turismo*.

OPM What are the major differences in going from cars to bikes?

KY I'll have to admit that first of all, it was more difficult than we originally thought it would be. When we first thought about it, moving from four wheels to two wheels—that's fewer wheels, so we thought it would be easier. But in reality, it was more difficult. Probably the main reason for this is because the rider is a part of the motorcycle. They're together as one—the movement of the rider influences the motorcycle and how it behaves. With a car, you can pretty much consider it a rigid object; the driver doesn't influence the car physically. So the bike is more dynamic in the ways that the rider can influence it, and that was the major difficulty that we faced when developing *Tourist Trophy*.

"LOOK FORWARD TO ONLINE FEATURES IN FUTURE GAMES FROM POLYPHONY DIGITAL."

OPM Were there any technical difficulties with the game engine when moving to motorcycles?

KY The hardest part would have to be the AI. It was very difficult for us, even more difficult than doing the AI for the cars [in *Gran Turismo*].

OPM How did you go about making this game as real as possible? Did you talk to riders? Did you go to tracks and check out all the bikes yourselves?

KY Well, of course, we did ask for opinions and comments from riders, and we did some tests and experiments on tracks. But one of the things that's very similar to *Gran Turismo* is that [opinion] is not necessarily a big part of development. It all comes down to the scientific analysis of "What is a car?" and "What is a bike?" and making sure that the simulation of that is correct. That's the most important thing. So opinions are not necessarily something we look for; it's not something that directly affects development of *Gran Turismo* or *Tourist Trophy*.

OPM What is the appeal of *Tourist Trophy* for someone who doesn't have a motorcycle or doesn't ride motorcycles?

KY I don't ride bikes, and I think a lot of other people are out there who also haven't had the chance to get on a motorcycle and experience riding. So it gives people a sense of what a bike would really feel like if they had a chance to go out and ride one; it simulates conditions and how the rider can affect the performance of the bikes. It's a good chance for people to experience that for themselves in *Tourist Trophy*.

OPM Did you have a lot of support from motorcycle manufacturers with *Tourist Trophy*?

KY Yes, particularly because we have the well-known image of *Gran Turismo*, and we already have relationships with a lot of the manufacturers through our experience with *Gran Turismo*. A lot of them were cooperative in supporting us with the development of *Tourist Trophy*.

OPM You knew this question was coming. Are you ever going to have online features in your games? Did you even consider maybe using *Tourist Trophy* as an opportunity to try online features and see how you could get them to work?

KY I can just say to please look forward to online features in future games from Polyphony Digital. In terms of *Tourist Trophy*, it was just a time issue that didn't allow us to implement online or any experiments with it. But we are preparing online features for future games, so please look forward to that.

OPM In that same vein, were there any other features that didn't make it into the final version of *Tourist Trophy* that your team had hoped to originally include?

KY Obviously, due to time restrictions, we were not able to implement a huge world like we were in the *Gran Turismo* series. For this reason, we kind of viewed *Tourist Trophy* as an experimental title for Polyphony Digital.

OPM So will there be any more *Tourist Trophy* games, or will you maybe integrate them into the *Gran Turismo* family and create a game that combines both aspects?

KY In-house at Polyphony Digital, we are able to put bikes and cars on the same screen; it is possible. However, there are restrictions with the PS2 and the performance it provides. For this version particularly, we've had to kind of skip that. For the future, we can possibly think about integrating the bikes and cars into one game. It is a possibility. [The *Gran Turismo HD* prototype shown at this year's E3 did in fact include both bikes and cars, but not together.—*Ed.*]

OPM Do you think you've done everything you can with the PS2, or is there more you can do with the system?

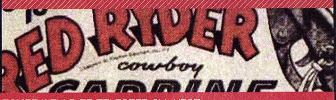
KY No, we've pretty much exhausted [the hardware of the PS2].

OPM What's next for Polyphony Digital?

KY Anything that you probably assume we're working on, we're working on. [*Laughs*]

IF WE RAN THE INDUSTRY

WE'LL ADMIT IT: WE OFTEN DREAM OF HOW WE COULD MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE IF PEOPLE WOULD ONLY LISTEN TO OUR WISDOM. DO YOU HAVE A SIMILAR DREAM? E-MAIL OPM@ZIFFDAVIS.COM WITH THE SUBJECT LINE "IF I RAN THE INDUSTRY." WE'LL FOLLOW UP WITH SOME OF YOUR BEST SUGGESTIONS. BUT FOR NOW, HERE'S HOW THINGS WOULD WORK IF WE RAN THE INDUSTRY:



GAMES WOULD BE RELEASED ALL YEAR

Videogames are no longer merely toys bought only by parents to be given as gifts under the Christmas tree for good little boys and girls. So why do 90 percent of games still come out in the two months prior to the winter holidays? This is actually detrimental to the success of most games, since they get lost in the shadows of the few huge sequels that come out every fall. There is, after all, only so much gift money to go around. We dream of a day when good games come out every single month of the year. Could it be that some company might actually capitalize, for example, on the copious free time college students enjoy every summer? Shocking!

NO MORE CRATES!

It seems like level designers have this weird fetish for scattering a bunch of boxes in their levels. What makes it sillier is that most of the time, these boxes don't have anything in them, so they literally have no reason to be in the game except to take up time and space. It's also really archaic to occasionally have health and weapons stored in these stupid boxes. Worse is when the box not only has nothing in it, but you can't even destroy it. It's doubly worse when those boxes are part of a jumping puzzle. Please, level designers, remember that the real world isn't controlled by some sort of box monopoly, and that you can use things other than crates to populate your levels!

THERE WOULD BE A THRIVING INDEPENDENT-PUBLISHER MOVEMENT

Next-gen games are going to be massively expensive to create. With teams averaging over a hundred people, there's a distinct danger that publishers' over-reliance on sequels, major brands, and "safe" genres (like first-person shooters) will get even more out of control. While we've seen some great exceptions—*Shadow of the Colossus* and *Katamari Damacy* to name just a couple—the games industry needs its own Miramax or Fox Searchlight, the sort of splinter studios that would have the freedom to take creative risks without fear of being shut down for lack of profitability. Sony's E-Distribution Initiative is a step in the right direction, but it will take the big guns—EA, Activision, and yes, Sony—to commit the funding and lead the vision.

ALL SPORTS GAMES WOULD BE SIMPLE AND FUN AGAIN

It's no secret that sports games have taken a lot of heat over the past few years. Year-after-year releases—along with certain questionable development moves—have made sports games a joke. On top of all that, developers are trying to cover up the lack of innovation and creativity in gameplay mechanics with fancy graphics and modes filled with excessive amounts of junk. We want sports games to go back to being simple with an emphasis on silky-smooth gameplay—and not on some mode where your fingernail size determines if your running back has good stamina or not.

NO MORE ESCORT MISSIONS!

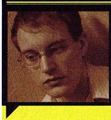
You want to know how to break up the pacing of a good game? Force us to protect a mewling weakling who has a malfunctioning flight reflex that results in said weakling running headfirst to the enemy. Escort missions are lame because oftentimes the escortee dies through no fault of your own. Designers should realize that maybe a handful of merely decent escort missions exist in the entire history of videogames—and take that ultralow success rate as an indication that we don't like them. Please, until the day AI can stop being a total dumbass (basically, wait for the PS22), just don't even bother making them.

WE WOULD STOP BEING AFRAID OF OUR STARS

Peter Jackson, Steven Spielberg, Francis Ford Coppola, John Ford. In the film industry, these and hundreds of other directors—as well as producers, writers, and cinematographers—have been household names practically since movies began. So why, with the amazing things that gaming can and has achieved, don't we have similar "greats"? Sure, we have our Kojimas and Jaffes, but they're few and far between. C'mon, videogame industry—embrace, nurture, and push your stars! Next-gen games are going to be so sophisticated—and every single game will be so important—that it will be vital that you go beyond the standard news-preview-review product cycle and show the world there are real, live, smart, interesting, and articulate people making them. |

PS1-DERLAND

THE ART OF THE SECOND GUESS



BY JEREMY PARISH

When he's not trying to reclaim his vanished youth with obsolete games, Jeremy works as 1UP.com's features editor and charming mascot. Check out his blog at toastyfrog.1UP.com.

If you've spent much time on the Internet, you've surely come to realize that the one thing everybody in the world has in common is a firm belief that *we* know best. Boneheaded decisions have plagued videogaming since its very inception, so naturally it's tempting to stop and wonder how much better we could have run the show.

But when it comes to the PlayStation era...well, when you look at Sony's 32-bit track record, there's really not much room for improvement. PlayStation took the company from a purveyor of bad movie-based junk software to the dominant power in the console industry...and all in the course of just a few years.

True, Sega and Nintendo did their best to help Sony's cause—Sega by utterly and completely undermining the Saturn's chances from day one, Nintendo by offering very little software and expecting gamers to pay through the nose for it. (If you've been following the industry for more than a few years, no doubt you have fond memories of the cartridge-versus-CD wars of the late '90s.) But those screwups alone weren't the root of the PlayStation's success; the credit for that belongs to great third-party games, brilliant marketing, and a deep understanding of gamers.

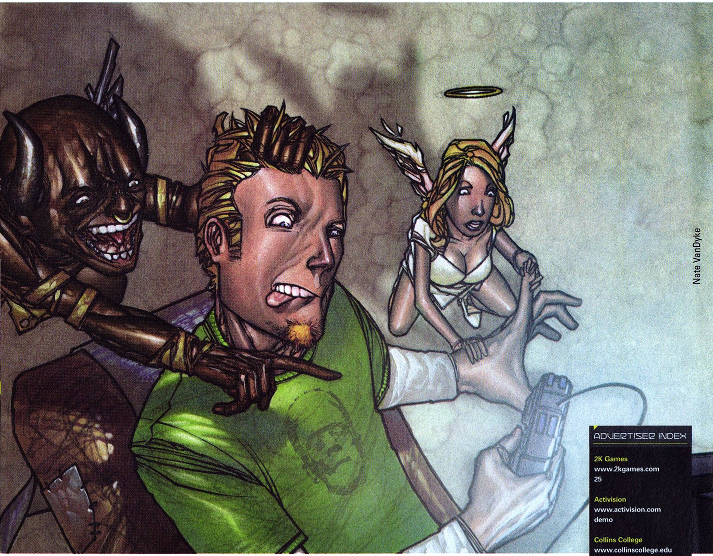
But hey, no one's perfect, and for all of Sony's smart PlayStation moves, the company had its share of boneheaded decisions, too. For starters, there was that whole "no 2D games" thing. Granted, this is something of an urban legend—Sony has never been completely opposed to hand-drawn games, just games that make its precious system look bad. Unfortunately, its definition of "bad" doesn't always jive with yours or mine. For starters, "bad" in Sony's eyes seems to have more to do with graphic sophistication than polished gameplay, and more than a few quality games have been shot down before making it to the U.S. because the visuals failed to impress whoever was calling the shots.

> BONEHEADED DECISIONS HAVE PLAGUED GAMING.

Frankly, Sony CEA would probably have been better off without such a restrictive approval process. It's nice to see the company taking an interest in the welfare of its platform, no question...but squashing great games due to some arbitrary decision deep within its corporate bowels? Shameful. At the very least the company could have had the decency to be *consistent* about approvals. Seriously, how did junk like *Punky Skunk* (a terrible platformer that would have been embarrassing on the Super NES) pass approval while a deep and entertaining adventure like *Arc the Lad 2* took years to make it Stateside (and then, only as part of an anthology)?

And then we had the censorship. Sure, Sony's edits paled in comparison to some of Nintendo's infamous cleanups, but they could be kind of silly in light of the company's efforts to project a "mature" image. Sony changed all of *Grandia*'s alcohol references to coffee, that choice beverage of lushes everywhere. Huh? Yet the powers that be didn't have a problem retaining the *Fear Effect 2: Retro Helix* scene in which one of the main characters is apparently sexually violated by a mechanical insect.

All in all, though, these are pretty minor considerations; the PlayStation is a shining example of how to do a console right. The real question is whether or not Sony will perform so well with the system's grandchild, the PS3. After E3, things are starting to look a little scary. |



Nate VanDyke

JOE RYBICKI likes brainless shoot-em-ups as much as the next guy, but longs for something with more substance. Agree? Disagree? Send your thoughts to opm@ziffdavis.com.

IN MY DAY...

BEYOND GOOD, BEYOND EVIL

If you've been playing along with the *OPM* home game (that is, our staggeringly awesome podcast—tune in at radiopm.1UP.com today!), you know that a few of us here have been bitten by the *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* bug. So I've been doing a lot of thinking about why this game is so compelling. I mean, sure, it's enormous, and sure, it's real purty, but we've seen other big, beautiful games that haven't captivated our interest (and that of millions of other players) like *Oblivion* has. But I think I figured out what that special something is that keeps people talking about the game: freedom.

Now, "freedom" is a buzzword that's been thrown around since *GTA3* made "sandbox" games the Hip New Thing. But consider what that means in the context of *GTA*: You can be a bad guy…or you can be a *really* bad guy. I mean, you can follow along with the main story and steal cars and carry out hits and whatnot, or you can do all that *plus* run down pedestrians and beat grandmothers over the heads with baseball bats. What you can't do is be a hero. (Well, you *can* be a goody-goody, law-abiding citizen, but that pretty much entails walking down the sidewalk and looking at architecture. Not exactly the most entertaining experience.)

Of course, that *is* freedom compared to what you normally find in games, where you're either a hero or an antihero, following a narrow path with few significant choices. But *Oblivion* offers real freedom: Completing the main story does involve being a basically "good guy," but if that doesn't float your boat you can play as a thief or an assassin—and get a game's worth of playtime out of either of those choices. You can be a paragon of virtue or the incarnation of pure evil; the game supports both choices and everything in between.

Of course, choosing to go down either path has legitimate, logical consequences within the game world. If you decide to play as a villain you will be *treated* like a villain, forced to tread lightly where honest, law-abiding citizens are concerned.

Morality within a game world is something that's been tried before; the old *Ultima* RPGs incorporated the idea heavily, for example. But it's not something you see too much of these days, and that is, to my mind, a damn shame. As we approach the point of diminishing returns with regard to graphics and size and realism, it's time for game designers to start turning all that technological prowess toward designing games that have real depth to them, depth that can only be achieved by giving the player legitimate choices within the game world.

When it's done right, the result is a game that offers a different experience to just about anyone playing. It generates lots of discussion, fierce dedication, and a fervent desire for more games that treat players like adults capable of making significant decisions. This is the final frontier of gaming, the *real* next generation. Designers, are you up to the challenge? |

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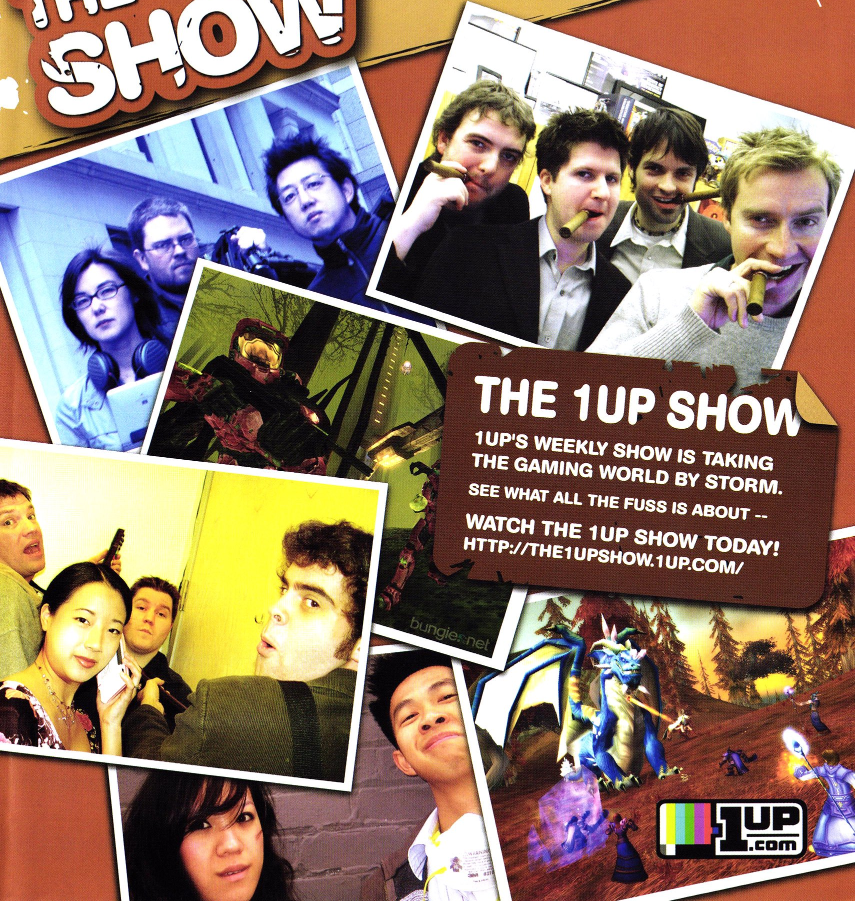

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